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Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 16.

THE WIFE THAT SAVED HER HUSBAND



New York :

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THE WIFE THAT SAVED HER HUSBAND.

As the congregation of a certain church, which shall be nameless, was slowly dispersing, after the Sunday-morning service, two ladies passed together through the door. The one was a venerable woman, somewhat bowed with age, of a singularly placid and gentle countenance; the other a young woman whose husband awaited her approach at a little distance.

I wish they had walked out of church together,—I mean the husband and the wife,—but some men do not like this courteous fashion, and so, while their wives linger on their knees in silent prayer, make their escape in precipitate haste, and tarry for them in the church-yard. Who would not prefer to see the husband with his wife on his arm, and holding his little one by the hand, go quietly forth into the air?

The younger of the ladies observing that her

husband was engaged in conversation with a stranger, detained her companion for a moment, and said :

“Please call by for me this evening, Aunt Sally, and let me go to church with you.”

“Certainly,” said the elder; “but will not Charles accompany you?”

“My husband has somehow or other taken up a prejudice against night service: it worries him for me to go. He says that Christian mothers should stay at home on Sunday night and take care of their children.”

“Then, Clara, do stay at home.”

“Why, aunt, I thought you liked night service. I cannot bear to stay away from church. You know my nurse is a most faithful creature, and Charles does not appreciate the importance of religious duties as we do.”

“I have no prejudice, Clara, against night service; still, I wish you would remain at home to-night. Bring your work over to my house to-morrow morning, and I will tell you why I give this advice.”

The lady acquiesced, and turned away to meet her husband.

The next day, after her household duties were discharged, Clara was to be found by the fireside of her widowed aunt. After the usual family

topics had been disposed of, she said, with some earnestness :

“Aunt Sally, I respect your judgment very much. I did not go to church last night, but I doubt whether I did right. The children slept soundly, and did not need me ; Charles did not talk about any thing but worldly matters. It seems to me that I ought to set him a good example. You know how anxious I am to see his life religious. Now, ought I not to let him see plainly that even he cannot come between me and God ; that I cannot, in order to please him, neglect my religious duties ?”

“Clara,” replied the old lady, “did you ever hear that my early married life was very unhappy ?”

“No, aunt ; how could that be ? My uncle was so affectionate and kind ; so holy and devout !”

“He was, indeed, ever since you were old enough to know him. But I was married fifty years ago. Clara, I must tell you my story. I have learned something by experience which may be useful to you ; and while the tale recalls some sorrowful memories, yet the Lord has been so gracious to me that it does not pain me to look back ;”—and the story was related in substance as follows :

“My husband and I were both young when we were married. Though baptized and confirmed, I was very thoughtless and worldly-minded, I fear. At least, I thought more of my husband’s clear intellect, and generous spirit, and commanding presence, than of his religious character. It was not long, however, before I was obliged to notice that my husband was a very irreligious man. I do not mean that he was opposed to sacred things; religious indifference is the phrase that best describes his state of mind. He never seemed to think that he owed God any thing; or that our Heavenly Father was a God with whom he had to do. I think he was a remarkable instance of what the world calls a chivalrous, honorable man. He scorned falsehood and meanness, and while he loved convivial pleasures, he had no inclination for vice or for low company.

“We had been married some eighteen months when my first great sorrow came. My little baby died; it was a little one, but I loved it very dearly. People said I ought not to grieve, but the little creature had so grown to my heart that I felt as if half of my life was gone.

“There was profit for me in that trouble; it led me to realize my dependence upon God, and to consecrate myself with greater earnestness to His service; but I was very sad and much de-

pressed. My husband was greatly distressed, too, at our bereavement, but he tried to forget it, and to divert his mind. The trouble that should have drawn us closer together, served, rather, to separate us. We did not sympathize with each other. I loved to recall the image of our babe ; he could not bear the mention of its name. I found comfort in the thought of the Saviour's sympathy ; he sought relief in occupation and amusement.

“ Yet I tried to consider his feelings. At the sound of his step approaching, I brushed away my tears and tried to be cheerful. And when he would leave me alone on a long winter's evening, while he sought gayer company, I made no complaint, but was ever careful to watch for his return, and to provide every thing that could conduce to his comfort. It distressed me greatly to think, that had I been more earnest-minded, and more consistent, my husband might have been more inclined to a religious life.

“ After a little, Clara, I had the misfortune to come under the influence of a very bad adviser. She died before you were born, and I shall not mention her name ; so. it will scarcely be evil-speaking to give some account of her.

“ She was a very active, talkative woman. She had a wonderful fluency in religious conversa-

tion, and spoke of her religious feelings without any reserve in all companies. She was a punctual church-goer, and always knew who was present and who was absent. She was never without a subscription paper in her pocket, and would tell any who came in her way just what she thought of them. I knew her once to address my husband, without any apology or preamble, 'My dear friend, do you know you are on your way to destruction? Let me warn you to flee from the wrath to come.' He laughed at her, and told her to study to be quiet—the Bible said that—and not go about like a roaring lion doing good.

"Clara, you well know that I believe in zeal and fidelity. Our religion ought to be all in all to us, and the word in season ought to be spoken by us all. But that word *faithfulness* is much abused: it serves as an excuse for presumption, rudeness, immodesty. Often we may think we are faithful, when we are only indulging our ill-temper and our bad manners.

"Well, I verily thought that woman was a saint on earth, and she gained a sad ascendancy over me. She told me that I had been too yielding; that I ought not to let my husband interfere between me and God. I ought not to permit cards to be played in the house (and, in-

deed, I always did stand in dread of that amusement, and still deem it very objectionable). She said I ought not to permit any Sunday work to please him, that it was my duty to rebuke him to the face when he was to be blamed. Thus was I persuaded to assume an attitude, which to my husband must have seemed unamiable and pharisaical. He complained, good-naturedly, of my cold dinners on Sunday; and when he found the complaint unheeded, began to find some good reason for going into the country on that holy day.

"I protested against card-playing in the parlor, and insisted that he ought to consult my feelings, and not make me connive at an amusement of which I disapproved. He argued with me in vain. The result was, he sought the same amusement elsewhere, and among companions very different from those whom he had invited to his house.

"I importuned him on the subject of religion, and, I fear, repeated a great deal of cant, learned from my female friend. And he began actually to oppose himself to good things, to make skeptical and irreverent remarks. I remember well the first time I ever heard him use a profane expression. He was going on a short journey, and in packing up his clothes I placed on top a tract;

not a modest and suitable one ; I remember it well. On the cover was a wild animal, struggling to get free, and the title, printed in large letters, '*Don't unchain the Tiger.*' Something induced him to open the trunk before leaving home. He picked up the tract, and turning sharply on me, he said, 'Wife, do you think me a child or a fool?' and then, with an oath, thrust it into the grate.

"Clara, there are great mistakes made in this matter of tract distribution. You know I have scattered many thousands of them. To give a tract away is easy ; to give it rightly is another thing. We cannot expect that advice, spoken, written, or printed, will be well received, unless it is given judiciously, and with a just regard to the proprieties of life.

"To resume my story : this folly of mine did not last long ; my own common sense soon showed me that I was doing mischief, and a more intimate acquaintance led me to suspect the prudence of my friend.

"It was a brief experiment, but it did much harm. My husband lost his respect for my Christian character, and formed habits and associations which were much to his injury.

"In a little while after we changed our residence. My husband engaged in merchandise at

Washington Court-house, and we bought a home a little way outside the village—the same where you have spent so many days of your childhood. And here begins a new chapter in my history.

“We had the services of the Church about once a month. On one Sunday a stranger preached for us; an old man, a dull preacher, everybody said. He read his manuscript very closely, and his style was rather too abstract for an ordinary congregation. But his sermon was blessed by the Holy Spirit to my good. In truth I had found out my own folly and shortsightedness, and was most willing to be instructed.

“His subject was the conflict of duties. He described, in language that went to my heart, the anxiety and distress endured by many persons who wish to do right, but cannot be sure what the right thing is. How hard is it, he said, to reconcile various duties; to be candid, and yet courteous; to be grave, but not gloomy; to reconcile humility with a just self-respect. And he argued that these embarrassments are so great that no one can find his way through them without the special grace and help of the Holy Ghost, daily sought and continually afforded.

“He proceeded to lay down two principles which it is safe to follow in our times of doubt. That which is plainly and distinctly enjoined is to be preferred to that which is learned only by inference and deduction. And again, he said, duties are either moral or positive. Moral duties are founded on the very nature of things, and cannot alter; positive duties depend more or less on expediency, and may be changed. Thus, he mentioned in illustration, to save life is a moral duty, to keep the Sabbath a positive duty: and our Lord did good on the Sabbath day.

“So, also, in the case of a father and child. A child ought not to lie or steal at his father’s command: truth and honesty are moral duties from which we cannot be discharged. But in such a matter as going to church (which is not only a duty but a positive duty), the fifth commandment is to be observed in preference.

“I know not whether you understand that, Clara, but it was very clear to me. And as I lay awake that night, I applied it all to my own case. I saw that the Bible teaches most plainly, that the husband is the head of the wife; that the wife must be subject to the husband, and win, not drive him, by her meek conversation, coupled with fear. I saw that to be a good Christian I must be a good wife; and in that

hour I solemnly resolved, that while I would be more earnest and devout than I ever had been, and strive more earnestly than ever for my husband's conversion, I would seek that end by compliance, gentleness, and a heedful attention to his rights and wishes.

"And oh ! how much easier duty became. Sunday dinners ! you all say I am famous for my good dinners on Sunday. I found out that I could meet my husband's wishes, and still keep up my rule, to have the kitchen locked from soon after breakfast until just before dinner. Some extra care and preparation on Saturday, a good fire left in the morning of Sunday to furnish a bed of coals, a savory stew prepared with an alcohol lamp underneath : there is the whole secret !

"So, also, about my devotions and religious reading. I ceased to obtrude them upon my husband. To some of my favorite books he had taken an aversion ; and sometimes he would take the Bible out of my hand, saying that I read too much in that book, it made me sad. Do not misunderstand me : I did not neglect devout habits, nor conceal them from him ; but I studied his convenience in my arrangements, and promptly laid by my book when he came in.

"And then I ventured on a bolder step : the

propriety of it some might question, but I think it was for the best.

“My husband was in danger of becoming a very dissipated man. During court-week he would often join some party of gentlemen at the hotel, and spend nearly the whole night in playing cards.

“So, when the next occasion came around, as he took his hat to go into the village, I took him by the hand and led him into the parlor. ‘What does this mean?’ said he, in a tone of pleasant surprise.

“A pleasant fire was burning; candles stood ready to be lighted; card-tables were set out in the floor, and refreshments placed on a side-table. And then I told him that he knew my opinions and feelings about these things, but that I had been too much bent on having my own way. I said that it grieved me for him to seek his amusement away from home; that he had the right to rule in his own house; and I pledged myself, if he would bring his friends home with him, nothing should be left undone on my part to make them comfortable.

“By this I gained a great deal. His visits to the hotel ceased: he had too much respect for me to bring any but respectable persons into our common home, or to permit any excesses

there. Seeing me considerate of his wishes, he became considerate of mine. He would now offer to accompany me to church; he would invite the minister home with him; he would talk to me more freely about his affairs; and in general, I may say, all hard thoughts were put to flight.

“Ten years of our married life had now passed away. My husband seemed as far as ever from the Christian life; but I ceased not to pray for him, and swerved not from my resolution to be meek and gentle. And the Lord performed my petitions.

“It was a raw, tempestuous morning. I had risen early, and was reading my Bible by the fireside, when my husband awoke. Our little son George, then about five years old, climbed, half-dressed, into the bed, and his father began to play with him. Presently the little fellow said,

“‘Papa, why didn’t you go and take the bread with mother yesterday?’ (He had seen me go to the Holy Communion.)

“‘Papa is not good enough,’ was the answer. ‘Parson Jones would not let me, if I wished to.’

“‘You *is* good,’ responded the child. ‘Mamma, would Mr. Jones drive papa away?’

“‘I think he would be glad to see him there,’ I answered.

“My husband, still playing with the child, said, with a comic expression,

“‘Papa is too bad ; plays cards ; does not say prayers.’

“Little George answered, with a strange gravity, patting him on the cheek,

“‘Poor papa ! don’t love Jesus Christ. I love Jesus Christ.’

“My husband put the child away, and proceeded to dress himself in silence. As he left the room, he picked up my Bible, saying, ‘Wife, I wish to look at a text in this book of yours. Where is that passage beginning, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man ?’

“I pointed it to him, and he carried the book with him to the office, as we called it, in the yard. You remember the log-room, with one window, and a sash set in the upper part of the door.

“Presently he was called in to breakfast. He rose in a few minutes, and remarked that the weather was so bad he would not go to the store ; he would be busy in the office, and did not wish to be disturbed.

“I did not think much of all this ; and an hour or two afterwards wishing to speak to him I went to the door. But before laying my hand on the door, I observed through the glass that the Bible was in his hand, and I stole softly away.

“When I went to call him to dinner, still he sat with the Bible in hand ; and he seemed to be in haste to despatch the meal, and return to his employment. Oh, how I prayed that day ! In the afternoon I took my seat by the window, and when a visitor rode up I met him at the gate, and told him my husband was particularly engaged.

“Three or four days passed thus ; my husband spent an hour or two in the morning at his place of business, and then returned to the office. There he sat until a late hour of the night. I did not ask any questions, or play the watcher. I felt that he was in the hands of God, and waited patiently, though anxiously, to see the end.

“The week slipped away until Saturday night came. It was after ten o’clock, when my baby woke, and taking him in my arms I hushed him to sleep. My husband was in the dining-room just across the passage, and heard me as I sung, instead of a lullaby, the hymn—

“‘Rock of ages, cleft for me.’

“I must have sung it over several times, for it seemed to suit me. As I laid the baby down in his crib, my husband entered, and took the arm-chair by the chimney-corner. Presently he said :

“‘Wife, repeat to me that verse you were singing last.’

“I did so.

“ ‘Should my tears forever flow ;
Should my zeal no languor know ;
This for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.’ ”

“He sat a while ; the muscles of his face began to move, and his breast to heave ; and then hiding his head against my shoulder, he cried, ‘O wife ! what shall I do ?’ ”

(Here the old lady’s emotions overcame her, nor could Clara but weep in sympathy. When they had recovered themselves, the story was continued thus :)

“And so the foundations of the great deep were broken up, and he told me all. For years past he had his misgivings, his seasons of self-reproach and anxiety. He referred to that card-table incident. ‘Oh !’ said he, ‘I saw then that there is a power in true religion ; that a Christian can sacrifice pride to duty.’ From that hour he had lost his zest for such pleasures, and had joined in them rather to preserve his consistency than any thing else. Little George’s remark had somehow reached his heart ; it flashed upon him, as it were, that it was a dreadful thing not to love the Lord Jesus Christ. He had resolved to

look at once into the Bible, and during those few days, he had read the New Testament twice over.

"The next day was a fifth Sunday, and we were favored with a service not usual. And when I saw my husband kneel right down, like an honest man, and join in the General Confession; when I saw him, after the service was ended, walk up to a neighbor with whom he had not been on speaking terms, and offer him his hand with a genial courtesy that could not be resisted, I felt, Clara, I knew in my secret soul that my husband *was saved*.

"In a little while he was confirmed. And I need not tell you how faithfully he walked before God for thirty years; how carefully he reared his children in the Church's paths; and how freely he expended his substance in building churches, relieving the destitute, befriending God's ministers."

As Clara took her leave she paused to say:

"Aunt Sally, some people might do a great deal of harm in acting on your advice. . You do not mean that I ought to encourage Charles in irreligious and evil ways."

"Surely, Clara, you understand me better. A wife's aim should be to save her husband. She should use all her influence for her husband's good. But she must be gentle; she must not

aspire to be the head; she must respect his authority. And if, after expressing her views, her husband does not agree with her, since both can not have their way, hers is the duty of cheerful compliance."

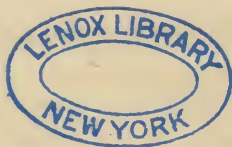
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Beautiful is the spectacle of an earnest-minded Christian woman, who tries to do her duty, while the husband, who should be her guide and adviser, has no sympathies in common with her, concerning the things she loves the best.

Most delicate is her mission. If, on the one hand, she be stubborn and imperious, determined that the household shall be governed by her views of duty, she will awaken resentment, and alienate affection.

If, on the other hand, she pleads her helplessness, yields to the force of circumstances, and ceases to hope for better things; if, in a word, her husband sees (and he will not fail to see it), that she moulds not only her actions, but her conscience to his lower standard, she ceases to be held in reverence by him.

Yet let not the Christian woman be discouraged. Weary not in the experiment of meekness and patience. Adverse as appearances may be, *What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?*



VISITATION OF PRISONERS.

PETER, a servant, was found guilty of murder, and condemned to die for the offence. He had borne an excellent character as a servant, until he had fallen into habits of intemperance. His crime was committed in a drunken phrensy.

On first visiting him in his cell, I said nothing to him about the crime for which he was condemned, but tried rather to gain his confidence, and learn something of his character. He had never "professed religion;" had tried to "get religion" twice; was seeking it once for eighteen months, but was provoked into the use of profane expressions, and left off praying. He knew the Lord's Prayer, and repeated it to me; did not know the Creed or the Ten Commandments. Add to this, that he was not at all deficient in intelligence, that he could read a little, and knew something of the Scripture history, that he was every way inclined to be instructed and assisted

in preparation for death, and a just idea may be formed of the case.

The first effort was to persuade him of the existence of sympathy in his behalf. Holding the Prayer-book forth (he had been occasionally at church, and knew something of its uses), I asked him if he thought there was any thing there specially intended for him. His attention was called to these directions of the Church: "When any person is sick, notice shall be given thereof to the minister of the parish, who, coming into the sick person's house, shall say," &c. And again: "When notice is given to the minister that a prisoner is confined for some great or capital crime, he shall visit him." The Church's care for sick and sorrowful people was brought out, and then the office for the Visitation of Prisoners was read distinctly and slowly, and without many comments. All this interested and awed him.

On seeing him again, the conversation was turned at once to the plan of salvation. I tried to explain to him that God has sent His Son to justify, and His Spirit to sanctify us; that these mercies are offered to the very vilest. These points were illustrated in various ways, and it was explained how and why repentance and faith are necessary, although they are in

nowise an atonement for our sins. And then, losing sight of other things, the talk narrowed down to repentance.

He said that he did try to repent; that he had thought over every thing he had ever said and done, and prayed the Lord to forgive him. But his heart was not softened yet, it felt "mighty hard," and he feared there was no forgiveness for him. All this was said quietly, and without the freedom of communication that was desired.

Subsequently, having apparently won his confidence, a tone of greater severity was used. I began to talk to him of murder. In a simple way, its history was recited, from Abel down to Christ. He was reminded what a sacred thing is human life; how God has hedged it around, and counts us more profane than Uzzah, if we dare lay rude hands, much more violent hands upon it. The law of Moses about accidental killing, the measuring from a man found dead to find the nearest city, and the solemn protest of the Elders that they were guiltless of that blood, the provision of cities of refuge, and the like, seemed to impress him forcibly. I persuaded him that murder, in its most hateful aspect, is the sin of profaning what God has made holy, of pushing, as it were, the Almighty

from His throne, and attempting to be judge and avenger.

Then murder was dwelt upon, in its human aspect: the guilt of hurrying a fellow-creature suddenly into eternity, of depriving mother, wife, children, of their stay and support, the encouragement afforded to evil by such an example. In all this I had his undivided attention. He said it made him see the truth more plainly, and he thanked me on several occasions for taking the pains to deal so frankly with him. And then, bowing down his head despairingly, but without much evidence of emotion, he added, it seemed nobody "had ever done so bad" as he, and he was afraid he could not be forgiven.

I asked him why he did not send some suitable acknowledgment to the bereaved family, and ask their pardon. He said he had done them all the harm that could be done them, and words could not mend it: besides, he did not see how they could forgive him.

To this it was replied, that confession was a necessary part of repentance; that in his case a particular confession of the sin for which he was condemned, and an express humbling of himself before those whom he had wronged, could not be dispensed with. It might seem a poor thing to *say*, "I have sinned against the Lord," but

one must say it; and when others had been injured they must go further, and say, "Thus and thus have I done."

He said, in reply, that he was different from some people; he never did talk much; it was always hard for him to cry; even when in pain, he was not used to "speak above his breath." And now he was so bowed down, it seemed not worth while to say any thing.

I considered a while, and said to him pointedly, "Peter, people thought you seemed careless and hardened when the judge passed sentence on you." He raised himself in a moment and asked, "What did I do, sir? did I say any thing wrong, or misbehave myself to the judge?"

"No, but you seemed like you did not care about what you had done, they said."

"They told me to stand up there, and I did just as they told me. I was so troubled and scared I didn't know any thing, and couldn't see,—and the people thought I was hardened and didn't care about having done so badly!" Here his fortitude gave way; he sobbed and wept convulsively. I was not sorry to see that his emotions were aroused, and, after some kind words, assuring him that the Lord judges us truly, left him alone.

On the next visit he spoke much more freely;

gave me some account of his history and circumstances; assured me that his crime was not premeditated for a single moment, and that he was horrified when he saw his victim lifeless at his feet. He accused himself with much more earnestness, and said that night and day he kept trying to humble himself and to find forgiveness.

It must not be supposed, that up to this point the law only had been held up. The mercy of God, the merits of the Saviour, the excellence of faith, were often alluded to, although repentance had been kept in the foreground.

Now, however, I dropped that theme, and spoke to him of mercy; and on several occasions, and with many words, sought to persuade him that Christ Jesus came into the world to save, not good people, but *sinner*s. The lost sheep, the prodigal son, the mercy shown to Peter, to Saul, to the dying thief,—these, and like instances of mercy, were pressed upon him, and he was urged to trust the Saviour.

I tried to explain to him the nature of this saving trust, and, in appearance, he grasped the meaning of it.

And now he expressed the difficulty that he felt no sense of pardon; his chain was heavy; he could not feel that he was forgiven.

I told him that I hoped and prayed some measure of peace and comfort might be given him, but that these did not always go with pardon: that the dying experience of mature saints would be unnatural in his case, and that I desired chiefly for him to have this prayer in his heart and on his lips, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

And now baptism, which had been often alluded to, was distinctly presented. And here the reader may, perhaps, see what practical use there is in the doctrine of Apostolic succession. For the sake of clearness, let us distinguish the several views presented to him.

1. In all important matters there ought to be some conclusive agreement. When men bargain, they talk and debate, it may be, a good while; at last they strike hands over their agreement, and the matter is ended. Even so, the Lord has offered to forgive you, and told you what His terms are. You have studied the matter, and done what you could: so far as you know yourself, you are willing to give yourself as a vile sinner, to be saved by grace. Now, in baptism you do thus yield yourself. You say, solèmnly, "I have sinned against the Lord;" and the minister says, "The Lord hath also put away thy sin." Thus dealt Ananias with Saul. "Now

why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized." What was Saul waiting for? He might lie in darkness and tears for years instead of days, and his case would be no better. He had learned to know himself a sinner, and Christ his Saviour; and he must arise, and call on God, and take his place among the pardoned.

2. What is it "to come to Christ?" You would come to Christ if you knew how; you are trying to come to Him in prayer, in repentance, in faith. But, oh! if you could only come as the sinful woman came, and lay your hands upon Him! Well, you can so come. Christ is here on earth, in His Church, in the person of His minister; and it adds reality to our religious acts to approach Him thus. Our Lord considered that we are bodies as well as souls; and so He provides a way in which we can approach Him with the act of the mind, and of the body as well.

3. You want grace to help you. You feel your need of the Holy Spirit; for I am sure, even in this solemn time, I am sure you find many bad thoughts coming into your mind. (Here Peter interrupted me to say, that some good people had been telling him that every thought and every breath ought to be a prayer. But it did not seem possible; all sorts of things

would come into his mind, and he got where he could not pray any more.)

You want the Holy Spirit of God to help you. Now that Spirit is given to us in many ways; but His presence is covenanted, after a special sort, to the sacraments, when we rightly use them. Then I explained the conversation with Nicodemus, and showed him how the new birth was of water and the Holy Ghost together. How strange this seemed to Nicodemus; and how strange to Naaman, that washing in Jordan could cure his leprosy. But, just as the Saviour with clay opened the blind man's eyes, so the Blessed Spirit sanctifies water, and bread, and wine, and through them imparts blessing to His penitent people.

The difficulty, however, still recurred, that he had no sense of pardon—no token that the mercy of the Gospel was for him, Peter. He did not think it right to be baptized until he had a feeling of sin forgiven. In meeting this difficulty I was led to speak with some repetition:

5. Of the important place in the plan of salvation which the Church occupies.

I reminded him how often we are enjoined in the Bible to "come to Christ." This command does not seem plain to many. They wish they knew how to come.

What does it mean? When Christ was yet in the world, those whom He summoned could really come. They could leave their nets and follow Him; they could come and embrace His feet, or touch the hem of His garment; and one sometimes wishes that he had lived in those days, and enjoyed such opportunities.

But we need not wish it; we can now come to Christ as really as if He were on the earth. We can come to Him, as those holy people did, in repentance and in prayer; and when we do thus, He is as near to us as He was to them, and hears our words as distinctly as He did their cries for help. Yet this is not all. Would you like to come to Him with your body as well as your spirit? to have Him lay His hand upon you? to hear Him say to you, for yourself, Go in peace, thy sins be forgiven thee? Well, then, you may have this privilege. There are ministers who stand in the place of Christ, and administer holy sacraments in His name. When you come to them, and say in a solemn way that you take the Saviour for your master, it is all the same as if you said it to Him in person; and when they tell you, Go in peace, it is Jesus Christ who speaks by their mouth. For we are ambassadors for Christ, and act in His stead.

A ready illustration here suggested itself. We

have talked about the importance of your asking pardon of those mourners whom your act has bereaved, and you ought not to be easy without it. You are confined in this cell, and cannot get to them; and there are good reasons why they should not come to this place. But you can send them a message, and they can send you a message. And a message of forgiveness, expressly sent to you by some one whom they have asked to carry it, is a very different thing from a mere report of the same thing by an unauthorized person.

See how the case stands. After our Lord had died for us, He might have given us the Bible. It would have been a great thing to have had safely written in the Book that all persons, without mentioning any one in particular, may be forgiven, if they will trust in Him. But this did not satisfy Him. He wanted each one of us to have that precious promise sealed to him, for himself and by himself. And so he called certain men, whom he named apostles, and said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." They were to seek sinners, just as He had sought them; they were to go and preach the good news to many persons together, as He had been used to do; and then they were to baptize—that is, to receive individual sinners, one by

one, and declare their sins forgiven. And He promised to be with those messengers always, even to the end of the world. The good news is not only like something published to everybody in a newspaper—it is like a letter passed from hand to hand. He sent the apostles, and they sent another set of men, and they another, and so on from age to age; and at last the right to speak for the Saviour has travelled all the way down to me, and I come right to you in this prison, and tell you that the Lord Jesus has sent me to let you know, that, wickedly as you have behaved, He is willing to forgive you. Now this message comes from the blessed Saviour, because His ambassadors come to you in His name, and speak by His authority.

You must not think, I added, that I am making much of myself. In the court-house there may be men as wise and as good as the judge, but nobody except the judge has the right to pronounce sentence one way or another. Just so I may be the least of all the saints, but because the Lord has sent me, has made me His officer, I speak to you with authority, and my message to you is from God.

Peter seemed to be much impressed with these views; but he was at a loss—he had thought about all he had ever done, and prayed night

and day for pardon; he hardly knew how it was with him. The conversation then turned more definitely on baptism.

I said to him, You know that it will not do to keep on talking and thinking forever; there is a proper time when we should settle questions. I have come to you, and told you on what conditions the Lord will pardon. You tell me that you do repent in dust and ashes; you make no excuse for yourself, and have no hope but in the merits of the Saviour. What comes next? Stand up on your feet to be baptized; say to God's minister, I have sinned against the Lord; and it is his duty to answer back, The Lord hath also put away thy sin. You must believe that He is in earnest; that He does forgive His penitent people, and from that faith, comfort and peace will flow.

Peter next demanded whether there was not danger in being baptized; might it not make his case worse?

Yes, I said, there is a danger; a man's case may be the worse for being baptized: there was a man once in this very cell whom I dared not baptize, and whom I earnestly advised to avoid uttering expressions of trust and resignation.

Why? asked Peter.

Because that man had no concern for his wick-

edness, except for the pain that followed it. He did not so much as try to extend forgiveness to persons who had wronged him, as he supposed. The answers of the baptismal service in his mouth would have been an awful falsehood. And so I plainly tell you, you must be very careful. You must pray for the Spirit of God to help you to know your own mind and will. If, after searching yourself with humble prayer to God, it seems to you, as far as you can make out, that you are grieved and sorry for your sins, and desire to have a clean heart; that you do trust in the Saviour, and desire to bear patiently this sentence which God has suffered to come upon you, there is no danger. But be faithful to yourself, and be very careful not to profess any thing which, as far as you know, is not the honest feeling of your heart.

He answered, that he would like to think the whole subject over; and would prefer that I should baptize him the next morning. He was to be executed the next day, within the prison-walls, and was satisfied for me to pay my last visit at an early hour, rather than towards the time of execution.

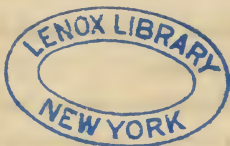
At the appointed hour I was again in his cell, passing some brethren of his own color, who had been with him. He looked well; had slept com-

fortably, more soundly than for many days. There was an air of greater composure about him, and he said that he had tried to cast all his burden on the Lord, and was not without hope that he might find acceptance.

But how men do yearn for something distinct and definite, something palpable to sense, to strengthen the conviction of their minds! He began to tell me, that in a doze, about day, he had seen a light, which stood a while and then vanished. I gently drew him away from the subject, and he readily spoke of other things. What else was said cannot now be recalled, for one thought was uppermost,—that here was one whose hours were numbered, and who at mid-day would pass into that solemn rest where intercession is in vain, and where the defects of repentance can never be supplied. He kneeled down and was baptized; the prayer for the dying was said; the Church's solemn blessing was pronounced, and the sinful man was left, not without a hope that his repentance was sincere.

It is not easy to minister aright to men lying thus fast bound in misery and iron. We must go in the fulness of the Gospel; we must plainly pronounce its sentence against sin, and earnestly press the mercy it has for sinners. But more than this, we must feel strong in the assurance

of a divine commission, awed in view of official responsibility. Disputation, timidity, private interpretations, suit not the exigency. The man of God must speak "as one having authority, and *not* as the Scribes."



LETTER TO A ROMAN CATHOLIC DIS-
TURBED BY THE NEW DOGMA.

FEBRUARY 16, 1855.

MY DEAR FRIEND :

* * * Our talk was prolonged until three o'clock in the morning. How much I have thanked you for your confidence! and how much was I edified by the recital of the "Trials of a mind."

After many years of fervid attachment to the Church of Rome,—an attachment which involved so much sacrifice of feeling, and with no disposition to complain of her established doctrines and usages,—this new dogma concerning the Virgin Mary, has suddenly come to startle and disturb you.

You are alarmed at the precedent. The question concerning the seat of infallibility is no longer open as heretofore. The Pope may at any time impose a new article of faith, under

penalty of anathema. You must henceforth be ultramontane or heretic.

Moreover, the doctrine seems to you new and monstrous. Your own familiarity with the ancient fathers assures you that they knew not of it.

Now what are you to do ?

I do think that you are in a great difficulty ; one from which it will not be easy to extricate yourself ; for, in certain matters of religion, you have presumed to form a judgment of your own, and that judgment conflicts with the teachings and practices of your spiritual guides. Are you right in this, or wrong ? Have you committed a sin, or have you performed a manly duty ? Must you drive back every doubt, and yield your conscience to another's guidance, or must you proceed and subject your whole system to the test of reason and calm inquiry ? I do not think you have any alternative.

A word or two about the province of *reason*. This is the only faculty we have whereby to judge of any thing. If we would not choose a profession save on rational grounds, much less may we a religion. The manner of its exercise depends upon the matter submitted to it ; its jurisdiction is sometimes absolute, sometimes limited ; yet, in some way or other, it has a right to

pass upon every question whatsoever. I am very far from affirming the right of private judgment in that licentious sense often intended ; for right reason itself teaches us to form our opinions upon inquiry, and with deference to authority. It forbids hasty innovations upon well-established and long-credited principles. But yet, a proper self-respect, as well as duty to the God of Truth, require that we offer Him *a reasonable* service ; a service of the Logos, as St. Paul expresses it in Rom. xii. 1 ;—a worship wherein the intellect and the affections agree.

It is said, however, that the office of reason is to guide us to the true Church ; to satisfy us that she is God's accredited representative on earth ; that at the portal of this Church she lays aside her prerogative of judging, and enters with us but to assist us in comprehending. And I grant that the man who has been satisfied on grounds of reason that the Church cannot mislead him, acts rationally in believing much on her authority.

But, there is a condition to this. Reason can never require us to believe what is unreasonable. She conducts me to a teacher, be it the Bible, the Council, or the Pope. She bids me receive the doctrine delivered by such teacher, however incomprehensible ; but if, on experi-

ment, that teacher contradicts indisputable facts and principles of nature, or is inconsistent in what is delivered, I must argue an error in my previous reasoning: an element is introduced which invalidates the whole calculation.

Thus, if I were convinced that the Bible inculcated falsehood and immorality, or taught any palpable absurdity, I must needs give it up; for, under such conditions, no amount of argument could outweigh my instinctive conviction that my Maker is Truth, and speaks truth, and loves truth.

So then, although reason may lead you to submit to the Church, and to receive without questioning, the mysteries she propounds; yet, after this, you have still a right to demand that this Church shall not shock your moral sense, nor contradict your reason, nor utter inconsistencies. If she *does*, you are bound to reject her, upon the identical grounds which originally induced you to submit to her. You cannot establish her claims by a certain logical process, and then, in deference to her judgment, deny the validity of that same process in its other applications.

I do think the Church of Rome teaches and practises many things repugnant to those principles of reason and conscience which are axiomatic; and without which we should be incapable

of any religion at all. I will only instance Transubstantiation. She requires me to believe that the same material body can be in several places at the same time: which is not *above* reason, but wholly *irreconcilable* with it. If your doctors proceed to argue, as Wiseman does, that extension is not a necessary property of matter, the doctrine is devoid of meaning; for my only possible conception of matter is that which occupies space: it is this alone which distinguishes it from spirit.

Your own great doctor, Moehler, allows that there is room in religion for the exercise of reason. He says: "Every educated Christian possesses such general notions of religion and Christianity; such general acquaintance with Holy Writ, that so soon as any proposition can be presented to him in its true light, and in its general bearings, he can form a judgment as to its truth, and immediately discern its conformity, or its repugnance to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity."*

Let us, then, look at the authentic records of our religion: we may omit disputed passages, avoid the question of translation, and seek the scope of the whole, and the spirit which per-

* Symbolism, Pref. to 1st ed., p. x.

vades all, instead of perplexing ourselves with minutiae of doctrine.

We are told, then, that the love of God moved Him to provide a way for our rescue from evident ills and dangers; and that the death of His dear Son, by satisfying the claims of justice, and by procuring for us the gift of the Spirit, has made this plan effective and available.

Christ came, then, proclaiming Himself a king. He came, proclaiming the "kingdom of God:" and under this comprehensive word, all that He instituted may be comprised. The "kingdom of heaven" is sometimes a visible institution, into which men are gathered in order to be saved, and carefully adapted to subserve this end. Sometimes by this phrase we are to understand *doctrine*; e. g., when it is compared to leaven: sometimes it refers to the inner life of the soul, "the kingdom of God is within you:" and yet again, it designates distinctly and properly, the abode of the blessed. Reversing the order a little, we cannot doubt that Christ has imparted to us—

1. A Church to guide;
2. Doctrine to enlighten;
3. Inward sanctification; and,
4. Heaven as our reward.

And yet this kingdom is all one. We cannot

have one part and reject the others. The Church ministers the doctrine. The doctrine (blessed by the Spirit) informs us with holy tempers; and these holy tempers fit and prepare us for the reward to come.

Now there is such a thing as the proportion of faith: we must not only hold all truths, but we must hold them in due proportion; for exaggerated truth is falsehood. Let us, then, apply Moehler's maxim to the comparative estimates placed upon the different aspects of the "kingdom of God" in the Holy Scriptures, and by the Church of Rome.

We discover, at once, that the founders of our religion greatly valued the doctrine and the Church; they were at much pains to set forth the doctrine plainly; they earnestly enjoined unanimity of opinion; they exhibited the Church as the ark wherein we may seek a refuge, and pointed to it as dispensing the gifts of the Spirit.

But what is that element of religion whereon they lay the chief stress? What constituted the burden of their teaching and of their prayers? It seems to me there can be but one answer: They valued, first of all, the new creation in the soul of man; they urged upon their converts the necessity of cultivating an humble, contrite, un-

worldly, loving spirit; they would have them live, day by day, prayerfully and watchfully; habitually realizing things unseen, and filled with gratitude to that Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them. However much they urged the ceremonial, it was always in subordination to the spiritual element; and the holiness which they taught men to aim after, was not submission to authority, or the performance of routine duties, but an inward temper of fear, and reverence, and gratitude towards Almighty God. Religion was to them, in its noblest aspect, not a fountain wherein men bathed, and whereof they drank statedly, but rather "a well of water *in the man*, springing up into everlasting life."

It is, then, an important inquiry, and one into which you have a right to enter, whether the system of the Church of Rome is not at variance with that promulgated in the infancy of our religion, so far as concerns the equipoise of the various elements. Of course, the result must be very much a matter of opinion, or rather, of feeling. Candor would require one to consider what change is due to altered circumstances, which necessitate the pressing of individual truths more or less earnestly at different times. But if it be true, that under this system the subjective of re-

ligion is almost swallowed up in the objective; if individuality of character and accountability are slighted; if it be true that the fostering of the evangelical graces is not now, as it was of old, the great end of the ecclesiastical economy, then does the system deservedly come under grave suspicion; the Pharisaic error is reproduced, of covering up and hiding great first principles with matters of secondary importance.

Let us now go on to consider whether the elements themselves have been altered, as well as the equilibrium destroyed. I will instance first the *Church*.

Of course, every alteration does not constitute a difference; changes in rites, and ceremonies, and methods of administration are to be looked for. But the great idea of the Church cannot alter. Now it seems evident at a glance that the apostles disavowed every thing like a desire to lord it over God's heritage; they spoke of themselves thus: "Not that we have dominion of your faith, but are helpers of your joy;" "we preach Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake." So far from desiring to silence inquiry and to compel obedience by their *ipse dixit*, they encouraged investigation; they used sound speech and logical arguments; they treated their converts as men, not as chil

dren ; they studiously respected the private rights of Christians, and acted out the spirit of their Master's declaration, "My kingdom is not of this world."

And, in pursuance of this idea, preaching constituted their main employment. And this is the more remarkable, because the laying on of their hands, and perhaps the sacrament of baptism, were accompanied with miraculous gifts. Yet they relied not on any mere manipulation to make and to build up Christians ; but they taught diligently ; they preached everywhere ; truth, the Word of God, was their offensive weapon. Every thing like ostentation or dumb show was an offence to St. Paul. He could not endure the words of an unknown tongue in a Christian assembly, unless the interpretation accompanied it. Furthermore, whatever view may be taken of the words specially addressed by our Lord to St. Peter, no one can affirm that he exercised the chief rule in the Church at that period of which we have an inspired account. Paul had occasion to rebuke him openly, and that for his official conduct ; he assumed no precedence in the council at Jerusalem ; and when Cornelius fell at his feet, he refused such reverence upon the ground that he was but a mortal. Certain it is, that among the many

words of Paul we can find none which implied that he had an ecclesiastical superior.

When, therefore, I see a priesthood almost monopolizing the Church; taking every privilege from the layman; making it the highest act of religion to receive their dicta in all matters of duty; demanding possession of his every secret; a priesthood so organized as to sunder them from the strongest sympathies of humanity, and to cause all home affections to be supplanted by an all-absorbing *esprit de corps*, I can but recognize a great change. So also of the never-ending ceremonial, the dumb show of the mass, the dead tongue in which the very Gospel is chanted, the disuse of preaching so evident save where the proximity of Protestants requires a different course, and its polemic character even then. So also of the claim set up by the Pope to utter the voice of the Spirit of God. If it be my duty now habitually to empty my whole heart to another, to learn from him my duty, to offer through him my vicarious worship, how is it that these rights are not secured to this favored class in the original charter of our salvation.

Let us glance next at *doctrine*.

Every one knows that the theme of which the apostles never grew weary was *Christ, and Him crucified*. They held that they need no longer

lie under a slavish fear of God. We have cause to tremble with exceeding dread so long as we conceive of Him as the abstract and invisible Governor; but they said, He has manifested Himself in Christ; see Him, and consider; He is full of grace and truth; He is gentle and considerate; He knows how to weep and loves to show mercy; He knows your trials, and has sustained your infirmities; He loves you well, and has given you the utmost proof of it; come boldly to Him then, for him that cometh He will in no wise cast out; come confidently, for the Father hath committed all things unto Him. "We have an High Priest, who can be touched *with the feeling of our infirmities*." Such was the Gospel Paul preached—*sympathy*, of the largest and deepest measure. He is mother, brother, sister, to all who trust Him. This considerate love of Christ was the argument wherewith they sought to revive the hopeless, and to cheer the desponding.

Let me quote a few simple lines which seem to bring out well this idea of a sympathizing friend:

"Thou'lt not rebuke me that my tears
So fast, so bitter flow;
No—I may pour into Thy ears
The fulness of my woe.
I come as to a friend, whose heart
Its humanness hath kept:

Who shall forbid my tears to flow,
Since Jesus wept?"

But these apostles must have been in error, if the modern theory be true. They taught the trembling sinner to fly to Jesus, and seek His intercession with the Father; the Roman Church points us to Mary! They tell us of the gentle heart that belongs to woman—she is gentle and full of pity; they tell us that when Christ frowns, we must seek Mary, and she will appease Him for us. In a word, the *cultus* of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the broad distinctive mark of the Church of Rome; it is increasingly so: her name is whispered by the penitent; her eyes beam gently on him from above the altar; her aves outnumber the paternosters.

Were the apostles animated by this spirit? Did they know this doctrine, or preach it? Did St. John ever invoke the intercession of the most Holy Mary, Mother of God? or did St. Paul ever utter such a benediction as the Pope in his allocution, "May the most Holy Virgin, immaculate in conception, assist you; may she be your faithful counsellor in doubt, your support in affliction, your help in adversity?"

You are no doubt acquainted with that beautiful legend touching Peter's martyrdom. Actuated by fear, he was fleeing from Rome by the

Appian Road, in the early dawn, when he met our Lord. Casting himself at his Master's feet, he asked, "Domine, quò vadis?" To which the Lord replied, "*Venio iterum crucifigi.*" Peter, ashamed and penitent, thereupon turned back, and was martyred.

Now, when men, after all the tenderness which Christ has manifested, prefer another to Him,—instruct sinners to go to Mary as more gentle-hearted than He,—methinks we might almost expect to see Him again among us, and to hear from Him the reproaching words, "*Venio iterum crucifigi*"—"I come to be crucified anew." Oh! after all that Christ has done and suffered for us; after all His entreaties and invitations, how can men do Him this dishonor of appealing to the influence of Mary; of crying, "*Jure matris impera redemptori,*" instead of going freely to Him!

My idea, to be more distinct, is this. After all the explanations that can be made, still Mary is represented as one whose influence prevails to win the ear, and touch the mercy of Jesus. Thus the Abbé Martinet: "Has the child defied paternal authority? The Father has but one feeling, that of indignation—one thought, that of punishment; if the sight of the fugitive excites a half-extinguished anger, the Mother interferes,

and the tempest is dissolved before this sun of gentleness."*

Mary more considerate than He who made excuse in Gethsemane for the slumberers! who turned and *looked* on Peter! Mary more approachable than He who shrunk not from the Magdalene's touch! No—a thousand times, no! I cannot wrong my Saviour thus. I want no gentler mother, no more loving sister than He.

This head of doctrine comprises many particulars: I have but illustrated by one. Nor will I go on to charge upon the Church of Rome discrepancy with the early Church in the matter of inward piety, and in its teachings touching the invisible world, for there are some other matters I want to write about.

I do not think you can possibly believe, that the *animus* of the present Church of Rome is the same with that of the Apostolic Church. After all explanations, it must be admitted that confession, saint-worship, purgatory, had not of old that prominent place which now they hold.

Will you accept the theory of development, to relieve a difficulty which it frankly acknowledges? You are no better off than before; for you cannot with a good conscience anathematize

* Religion in Society, vol. ii. p. 250.

me for saying what St. Jerome, St. Bernard, and even Pope Gregory, thought it no harm to say: nor can any process of development change a thing into something of a clearly contrary nature. But I have gotten upon another very interesting topic which I cannot pursue.

You ask, then, what do I think of the Church of Rome?

In order to answer that question, I must begin by saying that I do not look upon the Church of Rome as a unit, but rather as an aggregate of Churches who acknowledge the papal supremacy;—the Gallican Church, for instance, having preserved her independence more than the other members of the confederacy. These Churches have preserved the fundamentals of religion: the faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed; the ministry; the Word of God; the sacraments. (I have some trouble about the withholding of the cup: but let that pass.) Their errors, then, are errors of excess. To the Apostles' Creed, they have added that of Pope Pius; to the apostolic ministry, the papacy; to the Word of God, a mass of tradition; to the sacraments, other rites of a different character.

I think that these additions are of such nature as to make the original truth, in many cases, "of none effect:" the terms of communion are op-

pressive and unreasonable. Under no possible circumstances could I accept them, or submit to such requirements. Yet are they true churches, and doubtless many of God's elect are among them. I trust I may live to see the day when one or more of these national Churches shall cast off these additions, assert its independence, and restore itself to its original simplicity.

Nor am I surprised that all this has happened. It is all analogous to what occurred under the previous dispensation. Such defections are prophesied in the New Testament, and I think the special errors foretold, which we charge upon the Churches of the Roman obedience.

But all this brings me to a matter about which I am anxious to say something: viz., the Anglican Reformation. This is sometimes represented as a rebellious and schismatic separation from the Church of that day, begun and completed under a tyrannical and licentious monarch, whom all parties agree to despise and condemn. I remember your quoting to me a sentence from the Homilies to the effect that, for a long time, "all Christendom had been swallowed up, men, women, and children, in idolatry, —of all sins the most hateful in the sight of God."

I do not feel myself at all bound to maintain this proposition just as it is stated: but surely it

must be conceded that, at the beginning of the 16th century, and long before, good men everywhere recognized the necessity of a Reformation. Abundant proof of this is furnished by the assembling of the Council of Trent, with the avowed design of fixing doctrine, reforming morals, and correcting administration. Had not the existence of an evil been recognized, a remedy would not have been attempted.

The Reformation, then, was indicated long before it began; there were murmurings, disputings, inquiries on every hand. The Lollards had made a deep impression on the minds of the people; but the heads of the Church could not stir, because they were under the absolute control of the Bishop of Rome. Just at this juncture Henry proposed (though with any other than a religious motive) this question to the clergy: Whether the Bishop of Rome had of right any jurisdiction in England? An answer was returned in the negative, and in this answer concurred all the bishops except Fisher, the synods of Canterbury and York, the two universities, and the monasteries. Thus did the Church fairly express its mind, that the primacy of the Roman bishop did not extend out of Italy, and that henceforth she would not render him obedience. And thus she came into posi-

tion to reform her doctrines and her practices. One must see just here how important is the question of the papal supremacy; if submission to his authority be the law of Christ, then by its declaration of independence the Church of England placed itself in a state of schism; but if, on the contrary, there be no sufficient warrant for his claim, the Church did nothing to affect her integrity.

The Reformation extended over a very long period: for it was, strictly speaking, a *reformation*; not, as on the continent, a *revolution*. The changes were gradually made, and that by the authorities of the Church. In a word, the Church maintained her continuity with that of centuries past, unless that continuity was interrupted by the renunciation of the Pope's jurisdiction.

But I must not omit mention of grave difficulties urged. It is said the king was recognized as the head of the Church; that he actually exercised quasi-papal power; that the changes in religion were made at his will, and were ratified by acts of parliament. So that all this was a state movement.

There are several considerations which must modify these statements. Since the time of Constantine, things, civil and religious, had been

strangely commingled: religion, being by law established, needed the sanctions of law to effect alterations. The royal supremacy was variously understood, and much weight must be allowed to that figment by which the king was deemed the federal representative of the lay element in the Church. And the oath of supremacy received afterwards an important limitation: "*quantum per Christi legem licet.*" But even according to the worst showing, suppose that for a time it was King in place of Pope. It was but an exchange of usurpations, and it was a step towards emancipation. If the Church had erred in submitting long to the unlawful claims of a foreign bishop, she only perpetuated that error a while in submitting to the king. The changes in religion were certainly suggested and worked out by her own fathers, and whatever defects attended their promulgation by acts of parliament, were subsequently remedied by the confirmation of the Church speaking in her solemn councils.

The principles on which the Reformation was conducted, are plainly set out in the writers of that period. They sought to restore the Church to what it was at the Nicene period. They resorted, in matters of faith, to the Scriptures, and to the early fathers as their best interpreters.

They adopted the decrees of the first four general councils. Bishop Bull's last words well express the mind of the English Church: "I die in the faith and Church of Christ, as held before the separation of the East and West."

In the English Church, then, I recognize that triple ministry which the fathers had; the two sacraments which our Lord ordained; the creeds, which for centuries were the well-established, and only symbols of the universal Church; and the spirit of the Gospel, viz., faith towards God, and repentance towards our Lord Jesus Christ, faithfully preserved. And these three elements, the ministry, the sacraments, the Faith, are in my view the essential characteristics of the Church. There are sad pages in her history; she has had her days of darkness and of servitude; sometimes she has uttered an uncertain sound, and sometimes taken a step backwards; but she has never lost the essentials of a National Church, and her errors have been repented of. In her teachings I see that the inalienable rights of reason are preserved, while deference to authority and self-distrust are inculcated. She demands unity in such things alone as have always been deemed necessary; the rest she teaches and enjoins, but holds herself ever ready to answer the appeal to Scripture and

antiquity. She contends "for the faith *once delivered* to the saints," and utterly repudiates the notion that in any one age dogmas may be required to be believed as necessary to salvation, which were not so required in another age. The charge is preferred against her that she does not know her own mind; but why? It is because she allows freedom of thought, and recognizes a certain latitude of opinion as consistent with orthodoxy. She compels obedience to religion as a practical thing; she does not compel uniformity in philosophizing about it. Thus, the sacraments are acts to be done, as well as mysteries to be explained. Her children must frequent them, and utter concerning them the language consecrated by Scripture and antiquity; but in the explanation of the mystery, liberty is conceded. Doubtless, evils arise from this cause, but in this, as in the government of God himself, we find it is better to permit evils to exist than forcibly to prevent them.

Thus, my dear friend, have I set down many desultory thoughts. Do not suppose that I mistake assertion for proof. I have but sought to indicate such lines of thought as I would have you follow out for yourself. I am truly anxious about you, and fear lest the disappointment you have experienced in finding the facts and the

theory of your religion to conflict, may lead you to indifferentism.

We are warned often in the Bible against the world. It is hard to move about in it as you do, and still look through it and beyond it to your better citizenship; and amid all its vanities and excitements to preserve that weanedness of soul, which is the great characteristic of true religion. However intricate may be the problems suggested to the mind, yet are there instincts for the heart which we can follow out; and these plainly instruct us to remember God and His dear Son; to realize our dependence upon Him; to keep His benefits daily in mind, and to walk as nearly as we may in the footsteps of our Lord. God be thanked that our religions have at least this much in common. Your Church would fix an awful gulf between you and me; but it must not be so. No religion can sunder the charities of life; none should utter anathemas, or teach the children so to do. It is my earnest prayer that God will clear up your difficulties, open before you the path of duty, and enable you to walk before Him with quietness and comfort all your life.

And so I remain,

Ever yours.





SOMETHING ABOUT SAINTS' DAYS.

CLEAR and distinct rang out the cheerful notes of the church-bell upon the frosty air of an October morning, as, with quick, elastic step, Mrs. Morley pursued her way along the quiet village-street. She was dressed in mourning, and yet upon her face there was no impress of morbid grief. A contented, cheerful expression rested there, more in consonance with the bright sunshine and bracing air around her, than with the sable weeds which she wore. Passing rapidly along, she turned a corner of the street, and came up, face to face, with one of her acquaintances, who laughingly exclaimed,

“Mrs. Morley, of course! If I had any urgent business to transact with you, and heard the sound of that bell, I should rush up to the church, satisfied that I would find you either there or in the neighborhood. What is going on in church to-day, Mrs. Morley? Is it Ash-Wednesday or Good Friday?”

"Neither, Mrs. Hamlet," replied Mrs. Morley, smiling, "inasmuch as to-day is Thursday. This is one of the Saints' Days. It is called the festival of St. Simon and St. Jude."

"Saints' Days! Well, what will you come to next? Your minister displays wonderful tact and skill in inventing excuses for bringing you to church every day in the year. I suppose, when you all begin to weary of the common daily service, by way of giving you a little variety, and awakening your interest, he tells you to come on some Saint's Day, and he will give you a lecture upon his life and character. I think, however, that he has made rather a poor selection this time, for I am sure it will tax his ingenuity to write a sermon about St. Simon and St. Jude. If I mistake not, there is less said about them in the Bible than almost any others. However, I suppose where the Bible is silent he can fall back upon tradition, and where tradition is at fault his own imagination will supply the deficiency."

Mrs. Hamlet spoke so rapidly that Mrs. Morley had no alternative but to wait quietly until she had finished before she ventured a reply. In her friend's manner, as well as in her words, there were a flippancy and an irreverence which could not but shock and pain a pious Church-

woman, and Mrs. Morley paused an instant before she replied, fearful lest she might be tempted to say something which afterwards she might wish to recall.

Then she said, very quietly, but coldly,

“The keeping of Saints’ Days, Mrs. Hamlet, is not an invention of our minister, by which to stimulate his congregation to more frequent church-going; it is a provision of the Church, and those of us who observe these days throughout the year, find it a very wise provision. As to this particular festival, I agree with you that there is very little said about these apostles in the Bible, but perhaps the minister can find enough for our instruction without, as you suggest, calling upon his imagination.”

Mrs. Morley paused. She felt that she had spoken coldly to her friend, who, she well knew, hid under a frivolous exterior, a warm, affectionate heart. She remembered that she ought, as a devoted Church-woman, to try and win others by patient instruction and gentleness of manner. So, taking her friend’s hand kindly and cordially, she said,

“Come with me, now, and see and learn for yourself the meaning of these Saints’ Days. There are many others much more interesting than this, but perhaps even to-day we can learn

something that we never knew before. Will you come?"

"I have no objection," replied Mrs. Hamlet. "My present errand can be performed just as well after the service, and I really feel some curiosity to hear what the minister can find to say about St. Simon and St. Jude."

They entered the church, and Mrs. Hamlet found herself, where she had never been before, in an Episcopal Church on a Saint's Day. She could not repress a slight feeling of uneasiness and discomfort, lest she might, by her presence, seem to countenance something that in her heart she believed to be wrong. The very name of "Saint's Day" aroused in her mind a chaos of mingled doubt and dread; and between curiosity to hear, and anxiety lest she might hear something that would shock her thorough Protestantism, her demeanor was at first restless and perturbed. Unaccustomed to the service, its solemn words failed to compose her, and it was not until the minister had been speaking several minutes that she found herself interested.

In his preaching, Mr. Worthy did not strive after effect. His design was to convey instruction in language so simple that the most ignorant could understand. He frankly acknowledged that he knew very little of the lives of those

apostles whom they had that day assembled to commemorate. The sacred history passes them by in silence, not recording a single miracle that they performed, and giving us no insight whatever into their characters. And yet this silence by no means implies deficiency of Christian virtues, or want of effective energy. Their earthly history is almost a blank, and yet how exalted their rank in heaven! Their names are inscribed, with those of the other ten, upon the foundations of the New Jerusalem, and they sit with their colleagues upon the twelve thrones as judges of the spiritual Israel. To attain this, how eminent must have been their Christian virtues, and yet they have left behind them little beside their names. How significant a reproof to those who complain that they are not appreciated; that after they have worked earnestly and faithfully for Christ and His Church, they not only fail in producing results, but get no credit from their fellow-men for their efforts; and who, therefore, dispirited and discouraged, shrink from active exertion, while the talents for usefulness intrusted to them are folded up and laid away. The lesson of this day is to hush all such unworthy murmurs, to make us willing to work actively and constantly, even though our labors are all unknown to the world, and to

teach us to believe that our honest efforts to do good are appreciated, and will be rewarded by our "Father, who seeth in secret," even though they be to mortal vision lost in the splendor of greater achievements and more illustrious characters. Sometimes earthly obscurity may be the road by which our Father leads us to heavenly renown.

The preacher spoke earnestly and feelingly, and his hearers listened as if his words went home to every heart. The lecture was very brief, but its design was accomplished, and the congregation silently dispersed, feeling that they had heard something which they must ponder and remember.

The two friends walked silently along for some minutes. Mrs. Hamlet was the first to speak, and very different were her tone and manner from the levity with which she had spoken before.

"Mrs. Morley, I am very glad that I went with you this morning. I hope that I shall not soon forget that lecture."

"Yes," replied her friend, "the instruction of to-day is well worth remembering. All of us, even the most humble-minded, are disposed to magnify our own work, and to love the praise of men, and we murmur and complain if we do not

receive that full meed of approbation which our own partial judgment conceives to be our due. It is well to be reminded that we must not always expect either success or appreciation in this world, but must be content faithfully to do our duty, though the world should fail rightly to estimate our conduct, or should even misconstrue it."

Mrs. Hamlet made no reply, but after walking on in silence for a little while, she said, abruptly,

"I thought that Mr. Worthy had chosen the most uninteresting of all the Saints to preach about to-day. I have changed my mind; I like St. Simon and St. Jude's Day better than all the rest. It teaches a practical lesson, which commends itself to my judgment, and bears upon the conduct of every-day life. I doubt if there is any Saint's Day in the whole calendar that suggests such wholesome instruction."

"You are not mistaken there, Mrs. Hamlet. There are few, if any, more useful in their teachings, though there are many much more interesting. You must not think, however, that Mr. Worthy chooses the Saints' Days for himself: the Prayer-book arranges all that for him."

"Indeed! I thought that the Prayer-book required that in the course of the year there should

be a commemorative service for all the Saints of the New Testament, but left it to the discretion of the minister to select the particular days."

"On the contrary," replied Mrs. Morley, "the Prayer-book appropriates a special day to each, and this day the minister may not alter. On an average, two Saints' Days fall in each month, except during the season of Lent; the Church has provided that during this period there shall only be one, and that, the festival of St. Matthias. There has always seemed to me a depth of meaning in this arrangement."

"Do explain it to me, Mrs. Morley. I cannot see any thing very remarkable in it."

"You know," said Mrs. Morley, "that the season of Lent comprises the six weeks immediately preceding Easter. Now, Easter is what is called a moveable feast, that is, as it is dependent upon the full moon, it does not fall on the same day of the month every year; indeed, it has a margin of more than a month, sometimes coming as early as the twenty-second of March, and never later than the twenty-fifth of April. Of course, then, you see that Ash-Wednesday, the first day of Lent, must be governed by the day on which Easter will fall, and therefore comes sometimes as early as the fourth of February. Now it is a remarkable fact, that in all the time included be-

tween the fourth of February (the earliest day on which Lent can begin) and the twenty-fifth of April (the latest period at which Easter can fall), there is only one Saint's Day, and that, St. Matthias'. Within that time (wanting but a few days of three months) there ought to be, following the usual average, about five Saints' Days. St. Matthias, you know, was chosen to fill the place of Judas, and the lessons and memories of the day refer rather to the traitor, than to the apostle who succeeded him. Now, during the Lenten season, the time set apart for special humiliation and repentance, and for the contemplation of our Saviour's sufferings and death, it seems very appropriate that the Church should call to our remembrance that faithless disciple, whose treachery delivered our Lord to His enemies; and should also teach us by his example that important lesson: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' Admitted into intimate communion with his Saviour, always about His person, and receiving with the others constant proofs of His tender sympathy and love, trusted, it would seem, rather more than the rest, inasmuch as he was the treasurer of the little band, there was doubtless a time in Judas' life when he would have recoiled in horror from the bare thought of such black ingrati-

tude ; and the Church lifts up a warning voice on this day, and bids each one of her children take care lest he prove a Judas ; lest, by his faithlessness and inconsistency, he inflict upon the heart of his Saviour a deeper wound than was made by the Roman spear ; lest he provoke God to utter against him the sentence first spoken against the treacherous disciple, that sentence of awful doom which is more appalling than all the fearful imagery used to describe the abode of the lost : ‘ Good were it for that man if he had never been born ! ’ ”

It was a solemn theme, one well calculated to awaken deep reflections, and Mrs. Hamlet felt no disposition to reply. They walked on in silence, and soon reached Mrs. Morley’s door. She asked her friend to come in. Mrs. Hamlet hesitated a moment, and then asked,

“ Are these all the Saints’ Days ? ”

“ Oh, no ! I have only told you of two, St. Simon and St. Jude, and St. Matthias. There are others much more interesting than these.”

“ Will you tell me about some of the rest if I come in ? I acknowledge that I am becoming interested, and I would gladly learn somewhat more about their observance.”

“ With the greatest pleasure. Come in ; with the assistance of the Prayer-book, and the com-

fort of a good fire, we can, I doubt not, spend a pleasant and profitable hour."

When they were seated in Mrs. Morley's cheerful parlor, she showed her friend the calendar of lessons in the Prayer-book, and pointed out to her the Saints' Days as they fall. At length her finger rested on St. Simon and St. Jude, and she said,

"You see, Mrs. Hamlet, this festival falls on the twenty-eighth of October, and the next one in order is that of All Saints, to me the most delightful of all days."

She paused an instant, and with her eyes glistening in tears, which seemed to contradict her words, she added:

"I am always very, very happy on All Saints' Day."

The name had awakened such pleasant associations in her mind, that she entirely forgot her intention to explain to her friend its design, and several minutes elapsed before Mrs. Hamlet could gain her own consent to disturb that pleasant reverie; but at length she said:

"Well, Mrs. Morley, I am waiting for you to explain this festival to me."

Mrs. Morley started as if from a dream, and lending the excitement of her feelings to her tone and manner, replied hurriedly:

"Yes, I will tell you what All Saints' Day is. It is a festival which brings to mind the doctrine which we profess in the Creed, 'the Communion of Saints:' a day in which the Church tells us that we may empty our hearts of the world's cares and anxieties, and clasp tightly to them the memories of our precious dead; when she soothes us with the belief that they are not lost, and bids us rejoice in the blessed hope of a reunion with them. My dear friend, All Saints' Day teaches me that my Saviour did not design that I should forget, or cease to love my friends when He took them to Himself; He only made them holy, and therefore more worthy of a pure affection and undying memory."

Mrs. Hamlet could not altogether enter into her friend's enthusiasm, for God had singularly blessed her in preserving unbroken all her family ties, but she could not look at and listen to Mrs. Morley without catching somewhat of her meaning, and she exclaimed with animation:

"It is, indeed, a beautiful festival!"

Mrs. Morley resumed more calmly:

"There is something touchingly maternal in the manner in which the Church remembers all her children. Not one is overlooked or forgotten, but in her household, as in the human family-circle, each child's birthday is commemorated,

and one day of the year specially devoted to his memory and the grateful contemplation of his virtues. The chief Saints of the New Testament history are thus remembered, and then, because all the days of many years would not suffice to afford one to each loving disciple, each patient sufferer for the truth's sake who has lived and died, the Church appoints one high festival, and throws wide her portals, and summons all her children to her courts, to remember and thank God for the sainted dead! Oh! my friend, you are buoyant and happy now. Those you love are still around you, and no vacant chair reminds you, by its emptiness, of the void in your heart; but when, like myself, you have lived to lay some precious form beneath the sod, and when, through long years, you have watched the grass slowly stealing like a mantle of forgetfulness over the quiet sleeper, and when your heart has ached with the ever-present dread lest after a while he may entirely pass away from the memories of men, oh! then, from your inmost soul you will thank God for an All Saints' Day; then you will cling to that Church, which, like her compassionate Lord, does not frown upon your sacred grief, or check with cold and harsh words your flowing tears, but opens her maternal arms and bids you come to a mother's breast to weep.

She tells you not to forget the dead ; she would not have you do it ; she would have you remember them, and thank God for the precious legacy which they have left you in their Christian examples. How kind and merciful in our Saviour, thus to consecrate one day in His Church to the ingathering of all these holy memories, and what an incense-cloud of gratitude must on that day ascend to His throne from the thousands of stricken hearts of earth ! Each All Saints' Day the Church renews her promise, that while time lasts, and she has a voice to call her children together, our sainted dead shall not be forgotten ; but, however humble their sphere, and unobtrusive their lives, they shall, with apostles and martyrs and saints of the olden time, be year by year commemorated."

Mrs. Morley ceased. Presently Mrs. Hamlet said, musingly :

"This festival falls on the first day of November ; that will be next Monday."

Then turning to Mrs. Morley she said :

"I will call and go with you to church, for I know that it will be a very interesting service."

"It will give me great pleasure, my friend, to have your company. It will be, as you say, a very interesting service ; it cannot be otherwise ;

but you cannot appreciate it as some of us will do. You will never fully realize the comfort of All Saints' Day until you have been bereaved."

The Prayer-book was open in Mrs. Hamlet's hand, and when her friend had finished speaking, glancing down the page, she exclaimed—

"Why, see, Mrs. Morley! here in the month of December are four festivals in succession. What does that mean?"

"This is another arrangement which well deserves our notice, and there is something very interesting in this group clustered immediately around the birthday of our Lord. Here we have Christmas, St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, and The Holy Innocents. Each one has sufficient interest in itself to claim our attention, but it is when viewed collectively that the beauty and harmony of all stand out in fairest proportions. Next to Easter, Christmas is the day of greatest rejoicing in the Church, and yet upon the cradle of the Infant Saviour rested the dark shadow of the distant cross, and mingling with the Christmas song, 'Peace on earth,' was heard the death-shriek of the martyr-babes of Bethlehem, and the wail of mothers who, in the striking language of the prophet, 'refused to be comforted.' At His very birth began to be fulfilled, what in after years Himself declared to be

the result of His mission to earth: 'I am not come to bring peace, but a sword.' And so the Church, catching the spirit of the sacred record, groups together around Christmas the three classes of martyrs who have suffered for Christ's sake: martyrs in will and deed; martyrs in will but not in deed; martyrs in deed but not in will.

"Of the first of these classes, St. Stephen is the type, a martyr both in will and deed; who, fully aware of the vindictive power of his enemies, knowing that from the sentence of that dread tribunal there was no appeal, and remembering that in his Saviour's case, purity and innocence of life were no safeguard against their malice, yet boldly made his defence, and even while they gnashed upon him with their teeth, fearlessly charged them with having been the betrayers and murderers of that Just One. And then, when rage was exhausted and malice had done its work, in the simple words of inspiration, 'He fell asleep.'

"St. John, the beloved disciple, is the representative of the second class. Honored above all men, in having penetrated into the most loving depths of his Saviour's heart, he returned that love with all the fervor of his affectionate nature, and would gladly have proved his affec-

tion and attested his fidelity by submitting to any death, however cruel or ignominious. But it was ordered otherwise: and he, the martyr in will but not in deed, was the only one of the apostles who died a natural death. He lived more than a hundred years, and spent his old age in striving to give voice and utterance to that holy principle which was so beautifully exemplified in his own life: '*Little children, love one another!*'

"The last festival in the group is that of the Holy Innocents, the martyrs in deed but not in will, the unconscious sufferers of Bethlehem, who in the mysterious providence of God were the first to suffer in the cause of Him who was then, like themselves, a helpless infant. We may not dare to question why it was that the mission of the 'Prince of Peace' was thus sealed with the blood of unoffending babes, but we may not, we must not forget them. The Church yearns with the tenderness of a mother's heart towards these her little martyrs, and year by year when her courts are wreathed with garlands and the Christmas-song is on our lips, she bids us pause and remember the Babes of Bethlehem, and realize how closely entwined are the Christmas-wreath and the martyr's-crown. And then, too, ever considerate of our feelings, she permits us to

link with these holy memories others very dear to every mother's heart. As in the festival of All Saints, so here, likewise, she comes to cherish, and not to crush our human affections, and with the recollection of these, her first children that she was called upon to surrender, she tells us to blend the memory of our own little ones, whom God has lent us for a while, and then recalled to Himself. Sweet, indeed, is the atmosphere of purity and innocence that lingers around this beautiful festival, and soothingly through the words of its touching Collect does the spirit of each ransomed infant whisper peace and comfort to its sorrowing mother."

Mrs. Hamlet's interest was thoroughly awakened now. While listening to Mrs. Morley's description of All Saints' Day, she had unconsciously caught somewhat of her friend's enthusiasm, but now a chord was touched in the mother's breast; she thought of the bright-eyed little prattler who was the light of her home, the idol of her heart, and earnestly she exclaimed :

"Oh! I like this most of all. It is a beautiful festival. I should think that on this day the church would be crowded with stricken mothers who, not like Rachel of old, 'refuse to be comforted,' but who go there to be comforted. There is something very beautiful in the idea of appro-

priating one festival exclusively to the commemoration of the little children."

"This love for little children," said Mrs. Morley, "is a very striking characteristic of the Church, and she seems to have caught the spirit of the Saviour, who loved to have them about His sacred person, and who, not content with blessing, must also embrace them, as though the fulness of his tenderness must needs vent itself in outward gesture and deed. The Church loves to linger over the incidents of our Lord's infancy and early years, and as if reluctant to leave the sacred theme, she appoints four successive festivals after the Nativity: the Sunday after Christmas, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, and the first Sunday after Epiphany, in which she recalls to us the memories of His holy childhood. And in the Christmas group of festivals, while two, the Nativity and Holy Innocents, are commemorative of pure and sinless infancy, she has selected for the other two St. Stephen and St. John, saints who, of all that have ever lived, blended in the most remarkable degree the loving and forgiving tempers of little children with vigorous intellect and manly courage. The whole baptismal office seems literally overflowing with love and tenderness towards the little ones of her household; but as this is their own

peculiar service, it would seem strange and unnatural were it otherwise. In the Saints' Days, however, this maternal feeling of the Church is most strikingly exhibited, and wherever it is possible, and sometimes where we least expect it, she interweaves with these services the thoughts and recollections of children. There is a very remarkable instance of this in the festival of St. Michael and All Angels. Beautifully are linked together here the angel in heaven and the child on earth! The Epistle gives us a glimpse of that glorious hierarchy, spotless in their purity, before the throne of God. The Gospel tells us of the disciples questioning their Lord: 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.' We are prone to think that between a seraph and a little child there is an immeasurable distance:

the Saviour and His Church place them side by side around the throne in heaven."

"I acknowledge," said Mrs. Hamlet, "that this love for the little children is a very attractive characteristic of your Church, and I do not wonder that all its members who are mothers should love it with enthusiastic affection. It is a maternal instinct to love every thing and everybody that loves your little child. But of all that I have yet heard about your Church, there is nothing that so touches my heart as the Innocents' Day. If I were an Episcopalian, I would contrive to have some association of this day connected with every one of my children. If I could do nothing else, I would have them all baptized on that day."

"Indeed, my dear friend, if you were an Episcopalian, you would do no such thing. Suppose that your child should be born in January; you would then have to wait almost a whole year before having it baptized, and this the instincts of a mother's heart and the teachings of the Church alike forbid. I certainly would never postpone an infant's baptism in order to have it done on that day, but I agree with you that there would be something very pleasant in having it signed and sealed with the baptism of water on the same day in which the Holy Innocents

were signed and sealed with the baptism of blood."

"And then," said Mrs. Hamlet, musingly, "if you should lose an infant—" she paused, and then repeated with emphasis, "yes, if I should lose my little child I would be compelled to be an Episcopalian. My heart could rest nowhere contented, except within the fold of that Church where there is a day consecrated to the memory of the Holy Innocents."

She seemed rather soliloquizing than addressing herself to her friend, and when she had finished speaking was lost in thought. The keynote had been struck, to which a mother's feelings must ever respond in answering chord, and unconsciously to herself, through her affection for her child, a powerful tie had been formed to bind her to that Church whose Saints' Days she was but a little while ago disposed to ridicule. Holy Innocents' Day! She loved the very name; it breathed of infancy, and purity, and heaven!

She was aroused by the voice of her friend, as she asked:

"Do you think of any other Saint's Day that you would like to question me about?"

"Not now," said Mrs. Hamlet, rising to go. "I would not willingly speak of any thing to disturb the pleasant impression now resting upon

my mind. I am much obliged, my dear friend, for your kind instruction, and have now but one request to make, that you will not let me forget the day on which this festival falls. Nothing could keep me from that service."

"Do not fear; I will not let you forget it even if you should be disposed to do so; but I scarcely think that you will need to be reminded. This day has taken a powerful hold upon your heart."

"It has, it has," replied Mrs. Hamlet, earnestly and thoughtfully; and shaking her friend's hand she went immediately home, forgetting the errand whose urgent necessity had sent her out so early in the morning.

True to her appointment, the next Monday morning, as the first bell ceased ringing, Mrs. Hamlet was seated in Mrs. Morley's parlor, and the two friends went together to Church.

The service for All Saints' Day was, as Mrs. Hamlet felt assured it would be, interesting and delightful. She could not fail to be impressed with the wonderful and beautiful harmony pervading Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for the day, and the comprehensive love which clasps in one embrace all God's saints, both the living and the dead, or in the expressive language of the Church's prayer, "knits together God's elect in

one communion and fellowship." Beautifully responsive stand the Epistle and Gospel, answering back to each other, as it were, from heaven to earth; the multitudes who gathered around the Saviour, as lowly and sad He sat on the mount on earth, typical of those vaster multitudes "whom no man could number," that in the apocalyptic vision appeared to the rapt apostle, casting their crowns at the feet of the same Saviour, seated on a throne of glory in heaven: the beatitudes which fell so gently from His lips upon the crowd of sinners around Him on earth, how feebly emblematic of those larger, and fuller, and eternal blessings which He lavishes upon the ransomed and sinless spirits in heaven!

As they were returning home, Mrs. Morley asked:

"What think you now of the observance of Saints' Days? Is it all a superstitious folly?"

"Very, very far from it," earnestly replied her friend. "I could never have conceived an arrangement at the same time so pleasant and instructive. And yet it is strange that sensible people (and you must know that I rank myself among the number) will allow their prejudices to take such complete possession of their minds that they make no effort to inform themselves. Saints' Days! I cannot possibly convey to your

mind any idea of what I included in this dreaded name, and yet the most hasty glance at the services appointed for them in the Prayer-book would have enlightened my ignorance, and therefore removed my prejudices."

"You need not have consulted the Prayer-book," replied Mrs. Morley, "in order to be convinced that there can be nothing wrong in the observance of Saints' Days, as the Church enjoins it. The Bible tells us that all these histories of God's dealings, both with nations and individuals, are written 'for our admonition,' and that they are 'ensamples' to us, and it is thus that the Church teaches us to regard the saints, as examples. Surely we need not be afraid to honor and cherish the memory of those whom God has deemed worthy of a record in His Holy Word."

As Mrs. Morley had predicted, Mrs. Hamlet needed none to remind her when Holy Innocents' Day came. The service did not disappoint her. In striking contrast, and yet in perfect harmony, stand the Epistle and Gospel, like the light and shadow of a picture; one part of it bathed in the radiance of heaven, the other veiled in the midnight darkness of earth's deepest sorrow. The Epistle catches us up to heaven, where we hear the song of the redeemed; the

Gospel recalls us to earth to listen to the wail of infant-martyrs and bereaved mothers. All bewildered, we seem at first to hear a discordant note that mars the harmony; but even while we listen, the martyrs' death-cry is swallowed up in that song of praise which none could learn but those who were redeemed from the earth, and the slaughtered babes of Bethlehem become in heaven "the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb;" those Holy Innocents, "in whose mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God."

Time passed on; and once or twice during each month the Church assembled her children to commemorate some saint of the olden time. Mrs. Hamlet was always present at these services, and none enjoyed them more. She no longer needed her friend to expound to her the wisdom and propriety of this arrangement; now that she was a constant attendant there, the Church herself proved the best teacher, and the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels appointed for these special occasions did more to enlighten and instruct her, and disarm her prejudice, than the most logical arguments ever could have done.

Often she would say, laughingly:

"Not an Episcopalian yet, Mrs. Morley; only I love the Saints' Days!" * * * *

The circle of the Church's year had been completed; again they had entered upon the ceaseless round of Festivals, Fasts, and Saints' Days, and had reached once more the threshold of that festival which had touched so deep a chord in the mother's heart.

It was the evening before Holy Innocents' Day, and the waning light rested upon a little form as purely white and as cold as the mantle of snow that enwrapped all nature. The hands were meekly folded upon the breast, and death had engraved a bright smile upon the infant features. Tearless, and fearfully calm, sat the mother beside that little cradle, and a gentle touch upon her shoulder was only answered by a dull and vacant stare.

"Mrs. Hamlet," said Mrs. Morley, "what minister shall I send for, and what arrangements shall I make? Will you have the service at home?"

The features worked convulsively, and in a burst of grief the mother sobbed:

"No, not here. Take my child to the church; that Church which, like my Saviour, has a place in her heart and her services for the Holy Innocents!"

And so it was: the little coffin before the chancel-rail added a touching solemnity to the

services, and singularly appropriate was the beautiful prayer appointed by the Church for the festival of Holy Innocents:

“O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify Thee by their deaths: mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by Thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify Thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

The mother's wish was granted. Ever afterwards she had the sweetest and holiest of memories interwoven with “The Innocents' Day.”

Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 8.

DEATH-BED REPENTANCE AND THE
PARISH REGISTER.

A NARRATIVE.



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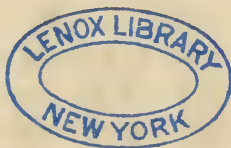
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By DANIEL DANA, JR.,

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DEATH-BED REPENTANCE AND THE PARISH REGISTER.

“I SHOULD be sorry to die just as I am now.”

So said Mr. Austen, an ingenuous but somewhat thoughtless young man, with whom Mr. Worthy had entered into conversation as they met in a morning walk.

“I have never taken hold of religion as I would wish to do. But I read my Bible and go to church. This morning I read the story of the Dying Thief.”

Mr. W. “And what did you make of it?”

Mr. A. “It is very full of comfort; do you not think so?”

Mr. W. “It is for some people, but I know of none for you.”

Mr. A. “Does it not seem to teach that,

‘While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return?’”

Mr. W. “By no means. It teaches that the

man who truly repents him of his sins, and steadfastly trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved; and this, even when his sins have been many, and his life is near its close. But there is nothing in it to persuade one that the man who purposely postpones his religious duties until the last, will have either the opportunity or the grace of repentance. I think I can show you a vast difference between this case and yours. For instance, what religious advantages had the thief enjoyed?"

Mr. A. "None that we know of: probably, in those evil days, he had not much to help him in the way of precept or example."

Mr. W. "This is a strong point against you, who are nurtured in a Christian land, and by a Christian mother. But consider again, that, so far as we know, he accepted the first offer of the Gospel that was made to him, whereas you have refused a great many offers."

Mr. A. "There is reason in what you say; but, per contra, Mr. Worthy, I hope I am a better man than he, and have less need of pardon."

Mr. W. "It pains me to hear you urge that plea. I shall not answer it, for I judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come. We brand, and smite, and hang the poor wretch who breaks

the commandments of the second table: exceedingly indignant we are at sins committed against our lives, our families, our property, and our honor. It will be for God to decide whether these offences are more heinous than the deliberate violation by enlightened men of the commandments which come first—which assert the claims of Almighty God. But all this apart, there are ten thousand chances to one against your opportunities of repentance being equal to those of the thief.” And Mr. Worthy proceeded at greater length than we can use, to specify some of these uncertainties, counting them off on his fingers.

“*First*, The thief was distinctly admonished of approaching death; he marched right up to it step by step. It is uncertain whether you will have such warning.

“*Secondly*, The thief was in full vigor of mind and body. His brain was clear; he could see, hear, and talk. It is uncertain that your last hours will be undisturbed by debility, drowsiness, or delirium.

“*Thirdly*, The thief had near at hand the gentlest and wisest of teachers—even the Master himself. It is uncertain that you will have any teacher at all, much more a judicious and faithful one. Often we ministers are troublesome; but

sometimes when men desire our help, we are not to be found.

“*Fourthly*, The thief had not lost his capacity of repentance. It is uncertain how long you may have this capacity. A man may go on from one thing to another—you may thus go on, until, when you come to die, there will not be enough of *man* left in you to make a Christian out of.

“But *fifthly*, what story did you say you read this morning?”

Mr. A. “The story of the Dying Thief.”

Mr. W. “You say wrong. There is no such story. ‘He was crucified between *two* thieves.’ One repented; not so the other. And supposing you have none of the disadvantages I have alluded to; that you stand upon an equal footing with these thieves; this story gives you the same reason to expect that you will be lost that it does to hope you will be saved. You have mistaken the bearing of this narrative. It is infinitely full of comfort to a contrite sinner, like to the thief, in his sin and in his sorrow for it; the man who has the sin, but not the sorrow, must look upon the other side of the cross; that thief is for his study, not this one.”

Mr. Austen was not unwilling to confess that he had judged and spoken hastily: there were

elements in this story which had escaped his attention. As they walked on, he proceeded to speak of the uncertainties of life.

“I ought to know,—indeed I do know, when I am serious,—that it is very unreasonable to count with certainty upon the future. Apart from Scripture, our ‘own poets’ have ransacked nature for images expressive enough to describe the brevity, the illusiveness, the uncertainty of life. I, if any one, should pray to be delivered from sudden death.”

Mr. W. “You have observed that I make very frequent mention of it in preaching. But after all, after all our talk, our pretty images, our smart sayings, our sentimental reveries, how little we realize the uncertainty of life! *Mr. Austen*, let me submit a few facts to you. As we have reached my study, come in and let us prolong our conversation.”

Upon *Mr. Worthy’s* table lay a large volume, with several loose memoranda lying upon the open page.

“This is the parish register. I have been looking over the record of funerals. Here is a list of all, or nearly all, who have been buried with the Church service in the last few years, and most of them were known to you. Would you like to examine this list, and see what it says?

We shall thus see how the case stands in our day and in our climate."

Mr. A. "With great pleasure. Your list is a long one for so small a congregation,—twelve last year; who would have thought it? But most of these names indicate children."

Mr. W. "Yes; I often think of Longfellow's lines—

'There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But hath one vacant chair:
There is no flock, however watch'd and tended,
But one dead lamb is there.'

God seems to call the little children to Him, that the hearts of the parents may follow thither. But leaving out children and servants, we have here the names of twenty persons; classifying them according to age, my account stands thus:

Old (over 50)	8
Middle-aged	5
• Young (from 16 to 25)	7 "

Mr. A. "So large a proportion of young people! Yes, I knew them all. Youth seems to be a poor protection."

Mr. W. "And even when we add other things. See, as my finger travels down the record; an only daughter, rich, beautiful—how strange it seemed to her that she must die! A young man of twenty-five; his parents left childless!

Another young man, not quite twenty-one, the stay of a widowed mother! Another, of about the same age! Here follow the names of two young girls who had just left school!

“Death is very inexorable. Oh, what bitter grief I have witnessed at the death of those young people, whose earthly prospects seemed so fair. We are dealing with facts now, not fancies; please note this well.

“Of adults, over sixteen years of age, who have died in this parish, one third were under twenty-five or thirty years.”

Mr. A. “It is even as you say. The old people on your list scarce exceed the young men and maidens.”

Mr. W. “Now let us make another arrangement. How much warning did they have?

Death preceded by lingering sickness.....	8
By sickness of a week or two	4
Sudden deaths	8

In other words, two fifths had no warning of approaching death, and another fifth the warning of but a few days.”

Mr. A. “But, sir, some of these eight were sick a while.”

Mr. W. “That is true; look over their names. With five of them death was instantaneous; they had not time so much as to utter a cry for

help. One died by casualty; another in her sleep; another in the street, of a sudden hemorrhage from the lungs; two others, who seemed to be in their usual health, were found dead or just dying. But there are three more in the list. I have added them, because consciousness forsook them when they were free from all apprehension, and never returned. Although they breathed some days, they had no more warning of their end than the other five."

Mr. A. "Yes, I remember. One fell down in a fit, suddenly. Poor fellow, he knew nothing afterwards, although he lived a week. That old man was knocked down by a horse, and never spoke again. And the last—what were the facts in her case?"

Mr. W. "In the midst of what seemed to be a trifling illness, all at once she was seized with congestion of the lungs and brain, and died in a few hours. Note then this second fact.

"In this parish two fifths of the people have died without any knowledge that death was near at hand.

"But let us take another look. I said that we must not count on having religious facilities about us when we come to die. Just observe this third fact.

"One fourth of these people died away from home.

“Here are the names of three who died at an inn or boarding-house, and of two who died on the highway.”

Mr. A. “These are interesting details. Can you, in addition, form any estimate of the proportion who were ready to meet God?”

Mr. W. “It is not for man to sit in judgment on his fellow-sinners. God alone can determine that question. But I can tell you what their religious attitude and position were. Of these twenty there were—

Communicants in fact, or in intention	7
Persons who had disused the communion and who expressed themselves penitently.....	2
Non-communicants	10
Unknown	1

“One half died without any formal voluntary sacramental confession of their faith in Christ. It is sad, very sad to think of. The Lord grant that their blood may not be required of me!”

Mr. A. “That record must remind you of some solemn incidents.”

Mr. W. “Indeed it does. I dare not tell you what holy, and again what awful memories it awakens. Some among them looked up to me and listened so meekly to my poor teachings, and died so sweetly and submissively! I must not talk about them. But here is one of whom I can tell.

“He was a musician in Barnum’s travelling menagerie. In the gray dawn, the wagon on which he was riding upset, and he was killed instantly: this was near our village. The show went on as usual. But the next morning, Sunday, they came to ask that I would bury him, and the funeral escort proceeded from the large tent to the burying-ground.

“His fellow-musicians were the chief mourners: they wept bitterly while standing by the open grave. I reminded them that they too were travellers and sojourners, and that death must soon meet them on the way.

“When the words ‘earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,’ were uttered, the roll of the muffled drum was added to the sound of the falling clods. And when all was ready for the grave to be filled up, they wiped away their tears and grasped their instruments, and then burst forth a dirge so wild and solemn as melted all our hearts.

“I did not know they could play so well: but the music came from their very souls. The fading sunlight, the subdued stillness of many hundreds gathered around, and then the heavy fall of the earth, which unconsciously kept time with that heart-broken strain, oh! I never can forget it. I thought of Robert Hall’s famous

sentences—‘If it be lawful to indulge such a thought, what would be the funeral obsequies of a lost soul? Where shall we find the tears fit to be wept at such a spectacle? Or, could we realize the calamity in all its extent, what tokens of commiseration and concern would be deemed equal to the occasion? Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light and the moon her brightness? to cover the ocean with mourning and the heavens with sackcloth? or, were the whole fabric of nature to become animated and vocal, would it be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe?’”

Mr. Austen expressed, as might be expected, his admiration of this beautiful passage; and he added—

“We do too often listen to sermons about the uncertainty of life as if it all were mere declamation. I own my error: your record confirms all your positions. That I should die in my youth, and at a moment’s warning, and with no one to counsel and console me, would be by no means strange. I wish, indeed, that I were ready to die.”

Mr. Worthy saw that his young visitor was moved by the conversation: there was no more of that flippancy in his talk which had hitherto pained him. He saw that he would now bear a

plain dealing, which in a different mood might have offended him. He proceeded somewhat as follows:

“I should be glad if, as the result of this conversation, you should determine to count less certainly on the morrow, and give heed at once to your safety. But I must express my surprise that you seem to think of nothing except your own safety: all you seem to care for, is to make sure that you will not be wretched after death.

“Just consider: you are a young man still; you have a sense of honor and justice; you are grateful to those who do you kindness; you have sensibilities, and can spare a tear to the poor musician who falls by the wayside.

“And what did you this morning, according to your own account? You read an awful account of the mystery of guilt; how, rather than pass it by, Almighty God suffered His holy Son to agonize and die: a story of boundless compassion and mercy infinite, all offered to you; a tale of suffering, and patience, and goodness, that ought to break a man’s heart. You ought to come from such a scene smiting upon your breast, angry with your sins, eager to do something for Him who did all for you. But no, you fastened your thoughts on one incident, and tried to persuade yourself from it, that you might with nice

calculation sin yet more, continue to evade all the claims of duty and of gratitude, and then make all right by a few sorrowful words in life's twilight. My friend, can it be that you cherish so poor a purpose as this? Do you let yourself think of religion only as a hateful necessity, a mournful alternative, to be preferred only to eternal punishment?"

The young man blushed deeply at this pointed appeal; he stammered forth something, half confession and half apology; but just then they were interrupted. Mr. Worthy did not regret it, for he knew that for the present enough had been said.

Reader! these are facts which we have laid before you; the plain, unvarnished tale of a parish register.

If you doubt whether it presents a fair statement, call over the roll of your own departed acquaintances. How many of them had fair warning of approaching death? How many were able to avail themselves of the warning?

Those are dangerous lines quoted by the speaker in the beginning of this tract. Say, rather, to your own heart—

“Hasten, sinner, to return;
Stay not for the morrow's sun,
Lest thy lamp should cease to burn,
Ere salvation's work is done.”



Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 13.

THE PRODIGAL'S ELDER BROTHER.



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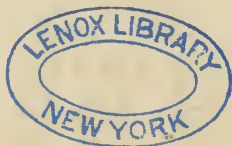
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THE PRODIGAL'S ELDER BROTHER.

EVERY one is familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son ; and few portions of the Bible are read with more interest and delight.

We wonder at the folly of one who demands "give me all my share, into my hand, and now ;" we deplore his reckless extravagance ; we are touched with the account of his utter destitution. As he talks to himself of the happy days gone by, and his heart and his feet turn towards his childhood's home, we feel right glad ; and we lack words wherewith to express our admiration of the forgiving parent, weeping on the sinner's neck, and drowning the voice of his self-reproaches, by the loud call to the servants for the robe, the ring, and the rejoicing.

This is not the end of the parable, yet are we not apt to stop here ? Are we not apt to pass hastily over the account of that censorious, jealous *elder brother* ?

Perhaps, we have heard it said, that the evangelical lesson ends with the prodigal's return ;

that this latter portion is intended to rebuke the jealousy of the Jews at the admission of the Gentiles into the Church. There can be no doubt that such a rebuke is intended, but there is something more than this.

In the first part of the parable we have a most engaging exhibition of our Heavenly Father's willingness to forgive the contrite sinner. This headstrong youth had scorned his father's house, and grieved his father's heart. But all the past is forgiven and forgotten in the joy of his return. The prodigal stammers out the confession he had prepared; to this the father listens. But (mark the delicacy of this incident) the son is not permitted so much as to utter the request he had intended to prefer—"make me as one of thy hired servants:" before he can speak the words, he is interrupted and silenced by the paternal love, heaping upon him the badges and ornaments of sonship.

You close the volume, and say to yourself, this picture is complete; nothing can add to this delineation of God's pardoning love and mercy.

Yet read on: you shall see this truth made more lustrous by the power of contrast.

There you have seen what reception the wanderer meets from his outraged father; *here* you may see how he is received by his upright and

exemplary elder brother. The father had no taunts or reproaches to utter; it was the elder brother who reviled him—"this, thy son, that hath wasted his living with harlots."

If the beginning of the parable teaches, How placable is God! the ending of it adds, How far more placable than the just and upright among men!

Thus much as to the doctrine of the parable: and next, what are its practical uses?

The world is full of prodigals, and for them this story is easily expounded. How shameful to ask for our good things now! what madness to turn away from God, and to sojourn among those who obey not his rule! How wretched, how inglorious the service for which the rebel has exchanged his birthright! How boundless is the pity, how overflows the compassion which greet him when he retraces his steps, and stands a self-accusing culprit, a self-convicted sinner against God and his own soul!

But, reader, are there not nowadays *elder brothers* as well as *prodigals*? Shall we give away all the latter half of the parable to the Jews, or shall we not apply this also to ourselves?

The race of elder brothers is by no means extinct; the good sons who have remained in their father's house and shunned transgression. But.

for all their goodness, they are less merciful, less placable than God. Sometimes they scorn the wanderer returned ; they reproach him with his errors ; they are angry and refuse to join in the welcome and the rejoicing.

Or to express all this plainly, *It often happens that awakened and penitent sinners are discouraged and kept back by pious people and good members of the Church.*

It sometimes happens that men of whom we would little think it, are deeply concerned for their souls. Such an one is listening even while he wears the appearance of indifference ; he is reading his Bible or praying when you think he is asleep. He sorely yearns for sympathy, while yet he is afraid to ask it : he is curious to know how others have escaped out of the miry pit of sin, but fears to inquire, lest he may be deemed a pretender. He selects his opportunity and his man ; he puts a cautious question ; he lets fall a seemingly casual remark that has a depth and a meaning in it ; he opens the door for a word of advice, solicitation, or encouragement.

But his elder brother will not understand him suffers the remark to pass unnoticed ; turns the conversation to things indifferent ; or worse still, answers with a jest, and evidences surprise that this sinful man should utter a serious thought.

Oh, how cruel! The poor man retires crest-fallen, mortified, dejected. There is no use, he says, in trying to do better; I am delivered to do these abominations. No one thinks that there is any good in me, or that I can ever be a Christian. And unless God in His mercy prevent, the smoking flax is quenched, and the bruised reed is broken.

What right have you to deem that man hopeless and reprobate? Perhaps you were once as ungodly and wicked as he. How do you know that God has said let him alone, and that the good angels have deserted him? Let the man see that you have no faith in him, and you have done all in your power to make him lose confidence in his capacity of becoming a Christian. Tell him, in effect, that you think him reprobate, and you have done much to make him so. In your thoughtless exclamation, "Is Saul among the prophets?" you may cause one of Christ's little ones to stumble.

If I may use so common a figure, I have admired the skilful housewife with her tangled skein: with keen eye and nimble fingers she catches the end of the thread; she never lets it go, but holding it as a clue, with patience, gentleness, dexterity, she unravels the knotted, twisted hank.

O elder brother ! would you catch up that one serious, anxious word, and hold it fast, and lovingly persuade other words to follow, you might draw out holy secrets from that poor sinner's heart, and set in fair order and connection the confused heap of his hopes and fears, his regrets and aspirations.

If the dead man stirs and his heart flutters, "loose him and let him go:" shame on you, if you screw down the coffin-lid, and block up his sepulchre ! When you find a little, feeble blade, where you knew not good seed had fallen, trample not on it with a careless heel ; protect and nurse it, rather. In time the birds of the air may lodge amid its branches, and yourself may be refreshed in its shadow.

But again : the former part of the parable is fulfilled in its strictest sense. Here is one who has wandered far and long : he has been vicious as well as worldly ; profane, intemperate, disreputable. Defiled and ragged, he comes to the Church : he stands at the door of his Father's house. And yet he almost fears to ask admittance. Is there room for such as he ? May it not be the prospect of starvation, rather than the love of home, which brings him thither ? May he not fall as he fell before, and bring fresh disgrace upon that holy household ?

These thoughts cause him to crouch upon the threshold, and to disregard the cry, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; why standest thou without?"

And his elder brother warns him off! plainly tells him that he has no confidence in his sincerity! intimates that there is no good in him left! Perhaps this old disciple takes his minister aside. "Sir, excuse the liberty, but you are a young man; you, ministers, are apt to lack worldly wisdom, and to be easily imposed on. I have known that man many years, and have in him no confidence whatever. You had better evade his request, and save the Church a possible scandal." Reader, did you never know of an elder brother thus pleading that the prodigal should be turned away, or permitted to lie shivering in the doorway? What mercy shall he find that hath showed no mercy? Wherein doth he differ from Simon the Pharisee? How dare he say that to this man, sinner though he be, God has not given the grace of repentance?

Let us take a third example. Some are presently to be confirmed; the elder brother does not positively oppose it, but he will not smile upon it. We have, he says, a well-behaved set of communicants, of whom the Church need not be ashamed. But these have not much religious

intelligence, much force of character, much steadfastness of purpose. I fear they will add nothing to the strength of the Church ; I hardly like to be responsible for them.

He talks as if the Church were his Church ; as if its reputation were dearer to him than to the Master who said, " Whosoever will, let him come." He forgets that the Church is the ark in which sinners are to be saved.

Perhaps these feeble-minded people will fall by the way, in spite of the solemn vows, the earnest admonitions, the abundant helps afforded them in the Church. But if this is possible, is it not certain that they will give over, if left without a religious profession to maintain, without those advantages and privileges which we elder brothers find so essential ?

Are we, then, it may be said, to encourage all sorts of men, without regard to character and conduct, to become members of the Church ?

By no means. The minister should see well to it, that those whom he admits are rightly instructed in the Gospel, and are acting with deliberation and seriousness. He should impress upon every such person the importance of examining himself strictly, and warn him how dangerous it is to utter vows which he does not understand and does not fully mean. If one has

been vicious and immoral, he must require amendment, reparation, restitution.

What I mean, is this. It is wicked and unkind to discourage any one from coming into the Church, out of mere suspicion. We must not pretend to try men's spirits, except in so far as their works betray them. Nay, this is not enough. We must avoid all unreasonable suspicion, and meet the penitent with frankness, generosity, and confidence. We must look on him, not as the profligate of past days, but our hearts must warm towards him, even as Joseph yearned upon his brother Benjamin, his mother's son. While the minister invites, the people must cast no unfavorable glances, must wear no forbidding aspect.

In truth, the elder brother is not unfrequently deceived. He opens wide the door for some, and closes it against others who are far more trustworthy. He is reconciled by a loud profession, by a marvellous experience, while he looks suspiciously upon him of the broken heart and downcast eye, who still repeats, Father, I have sinned, and can mount no higher.

A little boy, of sixteen years of age, once went forward to be confirmed, in a strange church, and where almost all were strangers; fearful, doubting, and greatly troubled. The

service ended. As he was about to leave the church, an old lady, a perfect stranger to him, caught him by the hand, and said, "My son, I am glad to see you here; I hope the Lord will prosper you!"

Simple words; yet they braced him as a cordial. He felt strong and comforted. And the recollection of that old woman's word has made him often pause and say to a younger brother, just, "God bless you!"

Oh, ye elder brothers, if ye would help those whom ye own as your spiritual fathers, be gentle and kind to your repentant brother! Say to him, "I always had hopes of you." How his eye will glisten! And whenever you behold a new member added to the communion, whether he is rich or poor, an acquaintance or a stranger, be sure you take him by the hand, and say, God be with you!

This is a sad, sad world; full of trouble and sorrow; of hearts bowed down by sin, and big with fears. A smile, a word, a pressure of the hand will cost but little; it may be a precious boon to a weary spirit.

And while you think not of it, the prodigal returned may pause in the midst of his contrite, grateful tears, and invoke a blessing on his elder brother!



THE MESSAGE TO PETER.

“But go your way, tell his disciples AND PETER that he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him as he said unto you.”—MARK XVI. 7.

AMONG the interesting events connected with the crucifixion and resurrection of our Blessed Saviour, there is recorded the visit of the pious women to the sepulchre very early on the morning of the third day.

When these women reached the sepulchre, they looked, and saw to their surprise, that the great stone at its mouth was rolled away. And when they entered into the sepulchre, they saw a young man, sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrighted. “And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted ; ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified ; he is risen ; he is not here : behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples AND PETER, that he goeth before you

into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you."

In commenting on the text, we shall take for granted that the angel who appeared to the women spake by authority from his Master; and shall, therefore, consider the message he delivered as coming from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is plainly intimated in the latter clause of the verse—"there shall ye see him, as he said unto you."

Let us inquire first, *Why this special message was sent to Peter*: go, tell the disciples AND PETER.

Although the name of Peter is incidentally mentioned, yet, we doubt not, it was introduced for a substantial and merciful reason; and that a great deal was conveyed in the simple addition of that one word. Peter seems to have been singled out, not because he was a particular favorite with our Lord; for it appears from the Gospels that John was the beloved disciple: nor was it because of any honor or priority intended to be bestowed on him above the others; for, in that case, Peter would have been mentioned before the other disciples. It would rather seem that Peter's name was added as a kind of afterthought on the part of the angel acting in behalf of our Saviour,—a considerate and merciful after-

thought, suggested by his late shameful downfall. Although when our Saviour was apprehended, all the disciples had basely deserted Him, and cowardly fled; yet the conduct of Peter was ungrateful and wicked in an aggravated degree, and had deserved the strongest reprobation from his Lord and Master.

He had, however, been made truly sensible of the turpitude of his behavior, and was now, most truly, an humbled, and a penitent man. All crushed as he was, under a deep sense of mortification and guilt, he must doubtless have felt, not only afraid, but ashamed to meet again his Lord and Master. As he painfully dwelt on all the humiliating circumstances of his melancholy downfall, he must have said to himself again and again, How can my Lord and Master ever forgive me for my late shameful conduct! How can He ever again have any confidence in any promises and professions that I may hereafter make! No doubt Peter's feelings of conscious guilt and shame were sometimes so pungent and overwhelming as almost to drive him to desperation.

Now, we doubt not, it was because the Saviour knew such to be the state of Peter's mind, that when the message was delivered, "Go your way, tell the disciples that He goeth before you to

Galilee, there shall ye see Him ;” there was added, by special designation, the name of Peter : “Tell the disciples AND PETER ;” as much as to say, *Be sure not to forget PETER* : Be very particular to tell Peter to go along too. Tell him that his Lord and Master heartily forgives him ; that He yet loves him, and will be as glad to see him as any of the other disciples. Yes, our Lord knew that Peter was so much mortified and crushed by a sense of his guilt, that he would be ashamed to acknowledge himself a disciple, and that he needed to be encouraged, to be inspired with confidence. Perhaps, without some such merciful intimation on the part of the Saviour, Peter might have gone off in despair, and have become reckless, and hardened, and lost. And this was the more likely, as he seems to have been naturally of an ardent, impulsive, and sensitive temperament. And therefore it was, that our blessed Lord, with the most delicate tenderness, caused a special message to be sent to Peter. Yes, it may be, that the thoughtful addition of that one word, was the means of bringing Peter to the presence of his Lord, and of saving that noble and gifted man from utter despair and ruin.

Ah ! what mighty power is there in one word of kindness judiciously uttered ! As the wise

man justly observes, "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" Oh! the misery that might be prevented, and the happiness that might be conferred, if there were a little more considerate kindness in the world! Great, indeed, is the power of kindness to melt and subdue the stubborn heart! It is, indeed, the mighty weapon by which God is conquering a rebel world, and bringing back proud and stubborn sinners to submission and obedience.

But we remark, in the second place, *what an affecting instance was this of delicate and considerate tenderness on the part of our Saviour; and what encouragement is herein afforded to every humble penitent to hope in His mercy, and to certify his faith through the sacraments of the Church.*

How different the conduct of our Saviour from the spirit of the world! The men of this world would have cherished the feelings of revenge and contempt for the ungrateful conduct of Peter; would have bitterly reproached him for his baseness; would have scornfully repulsed him; and would have forbidden him ever again to show himself in the presence of his benefactor. But, not so with the compassionate Saviour. Overlooking his own wrongs and injuries, He generously thought only of Peter's good.

Though grieved, deeply grieved, it was not because of the offence offered to himself, but because of the infirmity and sinfulness of Peter. He pitied the poor, frail, unhappy man. He saw, with sadness, the dark and deep abyss of shame and condemnation in which he was plunged; His bowels of compassion yearned over the fallen man; and He therefore pursued him with messages of kindness, and with all the winning appliances of love and tenderness. He did not wait for Peter to come forward, and make confession, as a condition of his being forgiven (this, indeed, would have been a great kindness); but He gratuitously sent after him, and gave him antecedent assurances of His pardoning mercy: and in this way He graciously won him back to rectitude, to usefulness, and to happiness.

Ah! how considerate and condescending was this conduct of our Saviour! What a delicate regard did He thus manifest for the sensibility, the wounded pride, and lacerated feelings of a fallen man! How interesting and lovely does the character of the Saviour thus appear! How infinitely exalted above the narrow, selfish, unforgiving, malicious, and vindictive spirit of the world! Who, in contemplating this transcendent and heavenlike conduct of the Saviour, as

exhibited through His messenger, the angel, would not exclaim with the Centurion who witnessed the crucifixion, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Most justly might it be inferred, that such spontaneous and exuberant goodness could have emanated only from the abode of heaven, from the bosom of the God and Father of Mercies.

And here, *what abundant encouragement is afforded to every humble penitent to go in faith to the Saviour of the world, and to certify this faith in the sacraments of the Church.*

When the poor sinner, being awakened by the Spirit of God, is crushed under a sense of his guilt; when he is anxiously asking what he must do to be saved, and is earnestly desirous to be reconciled to his God; when, all timid and alarmed, he fears that there can be no hope of mercy for such as he feels himself to be: let him contemplate the kind and condescending manner of the Saviour towards the offending, but penitent, Peter, and thus take to himself encouragement and comfort. Let him learn something of the mercy and goodness of the Divine Saviour; how ready He is to hear; how tender to pity and forgive; how prompt to receive and restore an humble, penitent sinner. Let this penitent bear in mind that the Saviour is "touched with

the feeling of our infirmities ;” that “He knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust ;” that He ever stands with outstretched arms towards a world of sinners, with the solemn proclamation : “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” Let the penitent be emboldened by the restoration of Peter, to return to the Lord in faith ; to take hold of His promises of mercy ; and, in the sacraments of the Church, to devote himself to His service, and to seek the supplies of His grace, through those divinely appointed channels. Let it be well remembered, that all those deep convictions of sin ; all this hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; all this struggling against inward corruptions, are the messages which the Saviour sends through His Spirit of Grace to call the penitent back to Himself, and to restore him to the paths of peace and salvation. He may be well assured that the Saviour having made advances, and having sought him out when he was a careless, proud, and haughty rebel, will not now refuse him when, humble and suppliant, he asks for mercy on the faith of promises and pledges made in the Gospel.

Again, *what an instructive example is here furnished for our imitation.* One of the great duties, earnestly enjoined by our Saviour, and

powerfully enforced by His example, is that of forgiveness of injuries. It is indeed made one of the express conditions of our salvation. In the Gospel many earnest warnings are given against a malicious and unforgiving spirit,—a spirit which is destructive of the graces of Religion, and the fruitful source of misery and suffering in the world. But, alas! how little of this forgiving spirit is exhibited, even among those who call themselves the followers of the meek and the lowly Jesus, and who often repeat the words of His prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” With what exacting tenacity do people cling to their own rights; and with what stubborn perseverance do they hold out in hatred and revenge! How eagerly do they catch at any plausible arguments to soothe the pride of self, and to justify hatred and malice, under the name of principle and conscience! And even when people do extend forgiveness, it is oftentimes reluctantly extorted, and with a bad grace; in an unkind and unfeeling manner; in a spirit of chiding and reproach; dwelling upon the errors and faults of the offender; harrowing up his feelings of shame and remorse, and thus, by a rude and rough hand, deepening the wound it professes to heal. How often are these acts of pardoning mercy so

performed as to leave behind a sting of bitterness, instead of an abiding sense of obligation and gratitude! Ah! how little is thought of the wounded pride, and mortified feelings, and penitential sorrows, and inward conflicts of soul, experienced by those who make confession, and ask for forgiveness at our hands! How often has the work of repentance and reformation been marred and defeated by the harshness of those who should have fostered and furthered it by kindness, and gentleness, and soothing appliances! How many persons of a sensitive, morbid temperament have been hardened in sin, and driven to desperation, for the want of a little soothing and condescending sympathy! How many are there, now crushed and fallen into sin, who need only the look of kindness and the voice of love, or some little expression of sympathy, to win them back to the paths of virtue! Ah! how seldom do we remember that a self-condemned and contrite spirit is tender, is sensitive, is fastidious, is suspicious; that such a spirit needs gentleness and sympathy; that, being timid, it requires to be encouraged, and inspired with confidence and self-respect, and not to be repelled by taunts and invectives! As the poet expresses the thought, in speaking of a broken and crushed rose:

“This elegant rose, had I shaken it less,
Might have bloom'd with its owner a while;
And the tear that is wiped with a little address,
May be follow'd, perhaps, by a smile.”

Ah! what a want there is in the world of spiritual sympathy; of bearing one another's burdens; of compassion for the faults and infirmities, for the wounds and diseases of the soul! We are prompt enough to feel for the sufferings and to administer to the relief of the body; but who thinks or cares to bind up the wounds of a broken and contrite heart, and to pour the oil of consolation into an humble and penitential bosom! How seldom are those to be found who would send a kind and inviting message to an offending, though penitent Peter!

Ah! if we would be Christians, in deed and in truth; if we would cherish the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and would bring forth the fruits of His Gospel; if we would enjoy in our souls the peace of God that passeth all understanding; and be qualifying ourselves for the blessed mansions of Heaven, let us be careful to put away from us all the feelings of bitterness and malice, of hatred and revenge. Let us cultivate the spirit of forbearance, of charity, of love; let us remember our own failings, and learn to look with pity and indulgence on the infirmities of

others; let the law of kindness be ever in our hearts, and its accents familiar to our lips; and let us be tender of the name, and the rights, and the feelings of those around us. Let us not be too hasty in judging, nor rashly conclude that, because something is wrong, every thing must be bad. Let us not only forgive those who may offend and injure us, but let us forgive heartily and fully, without reservation, without reproach, without dwelling on the wrongs and injuries we have received, without tearing the wound we would endeavor to heal, without crushing the spirit we would desire to raise and restore. Such is the conduct that will commend itself to the judgment and conscience in the solemn hour of death; such is the conduct that will meet the approbation of God, the final Judge of all the earth.

PRAYER.

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth, send Thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues, without which, whosoever liveth, is counted dead before Thee. Grant this for Thine Only Son, Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 14.

NAAMAN AND THE HEBREW MAID.

BY

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BISHOP OF ALABAMA.



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NAAMAN AND THE HEBREW MAID.

THE history of Naaman suggests to the thoughtful reader not a few interesting and useful meditations.

“Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver,

and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment."

Here we may learn *that great rank and station afford no exemption from the ills and sufferings of life.* This Naaman was commander-in-chief of the armies of the great king of Syria; and for his faithful and distinguished services was a great favorite with his master, as well as honorable with the people. He was a brave, gallant soldier, and had been a successful general at the head of his armies; and on one occasion had particularly distinguished himself by some eminent service of peculiar importance: for we are told, that "by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria." Next to the king himself, he was probably the most prominent, distinguished, and influential man in all the kingdom. A successful soldier; elevated to the highest rank in military life; a man-honored and beloved by the people; a special favorite with the king, his master; who, doubtless, heaped upon him not only honors and distinctions, but abundance of wealth, and possessions as well; living, in all probability, in great style, and magnificence, and luxury; surrounded, on all formal and public occasions, by a numerous and imposing suite of officers and dependents; his lot in life seemed eminently happy and enviable. No

doubt many persons, as they heard of Naaman's fame and martial exploits, and thought of his state and rank, and of his favor and influence with his royal master, and looked on his splendid house, and beautiful gardens, and showy equipage, and on all the pomp, and parade, and circumstance by which he was attended on occasions of state and ceremony; no doubt many persons indulged in feelings of admiration and envy, and said to themselves: Fortunate man! so high in rank! so great in influence! so renowned in fame! so blessed with wealth and all the means of enjoyment! Would that we could be as Naaman is!

And yet, in the midst of all these honors and distinctions, of all these riches and enjoyments, Naaman's lot was far from being an enviable one. With all these advantages, so much loved and so eagerly sought after, Naaman was a poor, afflicted, and unhappy man, far more to be pitied than to be envied, for "*he was a leper.*" He was afflicted with the most loathsome, disgusting, painful, and wasting disease to which the human system is liable; a disease, which in that day was considered beyond the reach of any healing art which man possessed; which entirely disqualified its victim for all the enjoyments of life; and which, among some nations, was visit-

ed with excommunication from all intercourse with society. The disease was of such malignity that it was the subject of special legislation, in the code of laws which the Lord prescribed for the government of the Jewish people. The leprosy of Naaman was so marked in its character, that even the little Jewish maiden, who was a captive slave in his family, far away from her home and her country, as she beheld the loathsome eruptions on his body, and witnessed the pain and anguish of his sufferings; even she was touched with pity and sympathy for his sad condition, and, prompted by a kindly interest in her master's welfare, said to her mistress, "Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." A poor, captive slave, as she was, she would not have exchanged places with her master, favored as he was with all the advantages of rank and fortune.

Ah! how little, after all, do we know of the real state and condition of man! How many, high in station, and blessed with all the good things of this world, whom those around envy for their good portion, are yet miserable and afflicted; suffering from some bodily infirmity, or wasting disease; or else, crushed and groaning under some domestic unhappiness, or pining un-

der some deep-seated mental anguish and mortification ! Ah ! if all the truth could be known, how often would the poor and humble in this life pity the rich, the great, and the noble ; congratulating themselves that they are free from the cares, the anxieties, and the responsibilities of wealth and station !

Notwithstanding apparent inequalities, the conditions of men in this world, so far as happiness is concerned, are more nearly on a level than is commonly supposed ; and doubtless, in general, men are far better situated in this life than if they had the entire control and ordering of their state and fortune. Ah ! well would it be for our peace and happiness if we could more frequently indulge in such reflections, and thus learn that happiness consists, not so much in worldly advantages, as in a well-regulated heart ; in the cultivation and exercise of Christian feelings, Christian hopes, and Christian duties.

Observe, again, in this narrative, how *Providence often accomplishes great and important results by feeble and apparently contradictory means.*

Naaman, being a great and influential man, with wealth and power at command, had doubtless been furnished with every advantage for procuring relief from his dreadful disease. The

most skilful and celebrated physicians, no doubt, had been called in to try their most approved medicines, and had labored with their utmost zeal to restore one so high in station, and so able to bestow rewards and favors. But all to no purpose; the disease yielded to no medicines; and there seemed to be no prospect before Naaman but painful suffering, which death alone could terminate.

At length, in the providence of God, relief came to him, and from a quarter the most unexpected. The little Jewish maid, who was a captive slave in his family, had been trained up in the principles of her religion, and was acquainted with the character and miraculous gifts of Elisha, at that time the most distinguished prophet in Israel.

And here one can but notice the great benefit which results from giving children a religious education. This little maid kindly told her mistress of this wonderful prophet, and suggested that, by his means, Naaman might yet be healed of his painful malady. This suggestion, though coming from so humble a source, being communicated to Naaman, was eagerly caught at; not only from the natural desire of diseased persons to try new remedies, but because he had confidence in the little maid. Her religious training

assured him that she would speak the truth. He therefore determined forthwith to go on a visit to the far-famed prophet. His royal master, being informed of the plan, not only favored it, but, being deeply interested in the welfare of his favorite, he sent Naaman in great state, with a formal letter to the king of Israel, and with numerous and costly presents for Elisha, hoping thereby to secure the good-will of the prophet towards the afflicted sufferer. The king being a worldly man, thought that of course the prophet would be influenced merely by mercenary motives; committing herein a mistake that is often made in judging of the character and motives of godly men. Naaman's visit to the prophet was attended with some interesting circumstances, and terminated with the miraculous and thorough cure of his leprosy, as may be found in the fifth chapter of 2 Kings. And not only was he healed, but he became a convert, as it would seem, to the faith of the true God, as taught in the Jewish Church. Thus, in the mysterious dealings of Providence, a little girl, carried away a captive into a strange country, and, as far as we know, held as a slave, was the means of relieving a great and distinguished man from a most fearful disease, and of carrying a knowledge of the true God into the very heart of a heathen

nation. An event so remarkable, attended by circumstances so peculiar, and happening to a person of such high rank and station, must have produced a great sensation in the court of the king of Syria; must have given rise to much conversation and inquiry; and must have resulted in the diffusion of much practical knowledge of the faith and worship of the one true and living God. How wonderful and mysterious, and yet how merciful are the ways and dealings of Providence! No wonder that the apostle should exclaim in admiration: Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

The narrative furthermore suggests *how good it is to show kindness to inferiors and dependents.*

From the whole tenor of the narrative we may reasonably infer that Naaman's wife was an amiable and tender-hearted woman, and that she was a humane and kind mistress to the captive maid who had been introduced into her family. No doubt it was this kind treatment that caused the little maid to be so grateful; that interested her in her master's welfare, and that emboldened her to make to her mistress the timely suggestion which resulted in her master's recovery. Here we see, in this case, as in thousands

of others, that kindness, even to the poorest and most humble, is never lost; that a good deed never goes unrewarded. Besides the present happiness which we find in the mere performance of the act, kindness will ultimately be repaid, and that too with compound interest. It may not indeed flow back in a direct channel from the parties that have been obliged; they perchance may prove ungrateful, but it will come incidentally, collaterally, circuitously, remotely, perhaps slowly, but yet most certainly and abundantly. "He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and look, whatsoever he layeth out, it shall be paid him again." Our Saviour teaches that even a cup of cold water, given in the right spirit, shall in nowise lose its reward. In general it will be found that the humble and dependent are more grateful for favors, and more generous in their feelings, than those who are prosperous and fortunate in the world; for this latter class are very apt to be selfish, wilful and exacting in their feelings and purposes. How important it is, not only as a matter of Christian duty, but of interest and personal comfort to be kind, obliging, considerate, and condescending to the poor, to inferiors, and to dependents; to treat them with respect, and with all due regard to their feelings and their

rights. In this world of changes and chances, none should presume to be independent of those around him; the strong, the great, and the wealthy may often be so situated as to be dependent on the aid and the sympathy of the weakest and the lowest; nay, like Naaman may be glad and thankful to listen to the timely suggestions of some little servant girl. There was, therefore, much justice and much propriety in the apostle's advice: "Be pitiful, be courteous;" and when, in another place, he enjoins it upon us to "condescend to men of low estate."

And there is the greater need to urge this duty of kind and condescending regard for the poor and dependent, from the universal proneness of men to look to the rich and the powerful; to court their favor; to rely upon their friendship, and to overrate their influence. While, therefore, we should by no means disregard the friendship of the rich, let us be careful not to overlook the poor; to value the respect, the prayers, and the benedictions of the poor and the dependent, for we can have no good reason to expect the blessing of God to rest upon our souls, or upon our churches, as long as we are indifferent to the wants and sufferings, the rights, the feelings, and the interests of the poor.

We all know how much the peace, comfort,

and happiness of a whole family depend on the tempers and deportment of domestics and dependents; that in times of sickness and suffering especially, the care and attention, the nursing and watching, of faithful and devoted servants are of incalculable value; that at such times they are our best and most reliable friends. Ah! how many can bear testimony, that oftentimes they have been indebted for all their comfort, and even for their lives, to the fidelity and attention of domestics! It is, therefore, a matter of prudence, as well as of duty, to be kind and considerate to inferiors and domestics; to be interested in their well-being; and to be ready and prompt to promote not only their temporal comfort, but their spiritual welfare. Such a course of kindness and prudence in the exercise of authority and discipline, duly tempered with firmness and decision, though it may sometimes fail, will, in general, not only secure the fidelity of dependents and domestics, but it will always insure the inward peace and comfort of superiors. There is scarce any thing more at variance with the character of a Christian man, or more destructive of all domestic peace and happiness, or more subversive of all good order and government, than the spirit of constant fault-finding and bitterness; the habit of reproach and threatening

towards those that are under us. Such a course is well calculated to discourage and repulse all the sentiments of respect, fidelity, and gratitude; and to make those that are placed under us careless, hardened, and unprincipled. We can hardly conceive it to be possible for the gentle influence of the Holy Spirit long to dwell in such an atmosphere of bitter feeling, of fierce tempers, and of interminable wranglings and reproaches. In general, the true character of the heart will be shown in the temper and conduct of persons towards dependents and inferiors. What a man may seem to be to those that are under him in his family, such most likely is his character as it appears in the sight of God. And therefore would it be well for Christians to give heed to the warning voice of the apostle: "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

These meditations may well be summed up in the words of our most excellent Catechism. The Christian child is there taught that he should "learn and labor truly to get his own living,

and to do his duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call him." Let us habitually carry out these instructions of practical wisdom, and dutifully use the means of grace provided in the Church; let us perform our business in this life with industry and care, and be punctual in attending upon the worship and ministry, the sacraments and ordinances, of the Church; we shall then serve the Lord in the way most acceptable to Him, and most profitable to ourselves; we shall be useful in our proper sphere of influence; we shall thus enjoy the inward peace of an approving conscience, and the cheering hope of God's approbation; and in this way make the best and the wisest provision for the life that now is, and for that which is to come; so that, thus having served God in our generation, we may be gathered to our fathers, "having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope; in favor with God, and in perfect charity with all the world."



Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 1.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

BY

THE RT. REV. THOMAS ATKINSON, D.D.

BISHOP OF NORTH CAROLINA.



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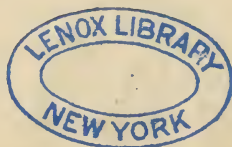
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By DANIEL DANA, JR.,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.



WHAT IS TRUTH?

THIS question was asked of Him, who came into the world specially to bear witness to the Truth, and who is Himself essentially the Truth; its object, as well as its Revealer. He who propounded the question, was unhappy, impious Pilate.

The Saviour of mankind was then experiencing the fulfilment of those prophecies which announced His deepest humiliation and misery. Deserted and denied by His disciples, He had already been dragged before one and another unjust tribunal. At the bar of Caiaphas He had endured a mock trial, and been condemned without evidence. But the malice of His enemies had outstripped their power. Though they could condemn, they could not execute their sentence; for "the Sceptre had now departed

from Judah, and the Lawgiver from between his feet."

In this dilemma, then, the infuriated Priests and Levites sacrifice the sentiments and instincts which heretofore had been the most cherished, and the most powerful in their bosoms; their jealousy of heathen interference in their national, and, especially, in their Ecclesiastical government; their abhorrence of that stern Roman domination which humiliated, even more than it oppressed them. They sacrifice even these powerful passions to that furious and almost diabolical hatred of the Holy Jesus which had become the master-principle; which had now, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up, as it were, the other serpents that infested their bosoms.

Urged on by this rage, they appeal, of their own accord, to that Jurisdiction, which, at other times, they were willing to shed their blood rather than acknowledge; they demand of the Roman Governor the death of their prisoner. Pontius Pilate thus appealed to, is greatly at a loss. He knew, none better, the wickedness of these men, and he, no doubt, scorned, like Gallio, all these questions concerning their Law; a Law which he never heard invoked except in the interests of spiritual pride, ambition, or malice. But he himself was far from being immaculate,

and he dreaded to provoke still further the hostility of men whom he had hitherto repeatedly outraged, and who were already demanding at the Imperial Court his recall and disgrace.

His feelings of justice and duty point one way; his apparent interest another. What shall he do?

He seeks, in the first instance, to extract from our Saviour's own lips a justification of the course which his interest prompts him to pursue. But our Lord, who thoroughly reads his heart, will not allow him thus to hide his baseness. Observe, in this point of view, the questions which Pilate asks, and the answers he receives. "Art thou," says he, "the king of the Jews?" If Jesus Christ now merely says, yes, as in effect He had often before done; if now He says, simply and absolutely, yes; then Pilate can at once condemn Him as guilty of high treason, as the rival of Cæsar. Our Saviour, with admirable wisdom, replies: "My kingdom is not of this world." His authority, then, is in no respect antagonistic to that of Cæsar, nor a just object of jealousy to the officers of Cæsar; for Cæsar's authority is of this world. This world is the only world for which Cæsar cares; the only world in which Cæsar believes. And our Lord goes on further to explain that His king-

dom is a moral and spiritual one; that He rules by the power of Truth, and that all who are of the Truth obey Him.

To this Pilate replies, "What is Truth?" What does the unhappy man mean by this question? Does he ask in good faith, in an humble and teachable spirit, that he may really learn the doctrines of the remarkable Person who then stood before him; and, if they commended themselves to his reason and conscience, embrace them? Alas! unhappily for him, this could not have been his meaning; for he does not even wait for an answer, but immediately goes out, this question unresolved.

I think it clear that he is speaking in the spirit of irony and derision, and his question is itself a sarcasm. It is as if he had said to his prisoner, Yours is indeed, by your own account of it, a notable mission! You poor man, whom the menials buffet, whom the very abjects trample on; you have come to bear witness to the Truth! What is this truth? Who knows it? When was it ascertained? There are opinions without number, one, perhaps, as good and as certain as another. But Truth, free, absolute Truth, who knows it? What is it?

This simple question reveals to us the man who asked it. As a flash of lightning in a dark

night gleams upon a man approaching us, and enables us in an instant to recognize his person and countenance; so these three words of Pontius Pilate disclose to us his state of mind, and character; for three words spoken in an earnest moment are worth three years of common-place talk, in enabling us to know a man. In these words we recognize the utterance of a troubled spirit, which doubts every thing; which sees no certainty but what the senses teach. Men of this sort may be found in all ages and states of society; but they are particularly abundant in an age, which is, on the one hand, sensual and luxurious, and on the other, inquisitive and enlightened. Such was the Augustan age in Rome; such was the 18th century in France; such, I cannot but believe, is the existing era in our own country.

The state of mind characteristic of these periods is not natural to man, but is a disease, the result of an artificial and corrupt condition of Society. Faith is natural to man; in saying which, however, I do not refer to Christian Faith, for that, we are expressly taught, is the gift of God in a special and supernatural sense (as indeed it must be supernatural, being the recipient and correlative of a supernatural Revelation). But I here speak of Faith, in its strictest

and most elementary sense, as the power of believing on testimony. This is an original faculty of our nature of the highest worth and most indispensable necessity, which may be affected and influenced by reason, by prejudice, and by passion, but has an origin independent of them all, and may work apart from other faculties, or concurrently with them. I call Faith a power. Many look on it as not much more than a weakness, confounding it with credulity. But it is in fact the power, by which a man is fitted for life, as well as for eternity. What can a man accomplish without Faith? Our daily life rests on Faith. We go forth to our work in Faith, *believing* that we shall be permitted to perform it; *believing* that, in some way, we shall be rewarded for it; *believing* that, after it, we shall be allowed rest and refreshment. We sleep in Faith, confiding in our safety; *believing* that no robber or assassin is at hand to destroy us. We eat in Faith, *believing* that our viands contain no deadly poison, no nauseous mixture. We learn by Faith. To what does History appeal but to Faith? To what Geography? To what Language? To what every thing, in short, save pure Science? Love rests on Faith. Without Faith, conjugal love curdles into jealousy, or blazes out into fiery wrath. Without Faith,

parental love withers and dies away. We live, even in this world, in an atmosphere of Faith, and as that becomes diluted, we faint; were it exhausted, we perish.

And while Faith is thus necessary for our temporal well-being, it is more especially the instrument of our spiritual life. God, Providence, Redemption, Eternity, Judgment, Heaven and Hell are perceived and realized only by the light of Faith. It is, to use the grand expression of an Apostle, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

This faculty of Faith was, no doubt, like the other powers and excellencies of man, perfect in our state of primeval integrity and holiness, and has been weakened by the Fall. Even now we may observe, that it is vigorous and active in proportion to the purity and innocence of him who exercises it. Observe, for example, a young child, in whose bosom sin still lies dormant, and whose face is yet bright with the reflection of Heaven; observe him at his mother's knee. With what unquestioning and absorbing Faith he listens to the tale she tells him, the counsels and instructions she imparts! How does he drink in nourishment from her soul, as when an infant he had imbibed it from her body; and how absolutely he yields himself to the impres-

sion which she desires to make! But alas! as he advances in life; as he finds himself in an untruthful and treacherous world; as he detects the falsehoods that are told him; and still more, as he himself becomes corrupt and capable of deceiving; he becomes likewise suspicious, skeptical, and incapable of believing. For falsehood in ourselves and Faith in others, are necessary and perpetual antagonists.

Society is made up of individuals. It follows then, as a necessary consequence, that when this individual deterioration becomes general, Society is corrupted, and Faith dissolves and dies out in its midst.

It was not by any arbitrary, or accidental connection, that the profligacy of French Society in the early and middle parts of the 18th century, was succeeded by the infidelity and Atheism, which so darkened and desolated that Society in the last few years of the same century. Kings, Priests, and Nobles had sowed the wind, and in due time, they reaped the whirlwind. The principles and practices of vice were with them the Dragon's teeth; Anarchy and Atheism were the armed men that sprang therefrom.

A tendency to unbelief is strengthened by other influences, with which we are experimentally very well acquainted.

When Truth is the subject of continued disputation and discussion; when every article of a people's Creed is alternately attacked and defended; when the tide of controversy ebbs at one point, only to swell at another; then Faith wavers; then, flitting over these angry waters, like the Dove in the Deluge, she finds no resting-place, and withdraws from the tumultuous scene.

It was at such a period that unhappy Pilate lived. His was a vicious age, and it was, moreover, a controversial age. The remains of Classical Antiquity which have come down to us from that period, admirable as they are for genius, and taste, and exquisite felicity of language, yet indicate a moral unsoundness scarcely to be conceived by those who live under Christian influences.

And as to Religious Truth, all was doubt and uncertainty. The speculations of some of the Philosophers, if not borrowed from Asia, and ultimately from Judea, were wonderful efforts of the human mind; sometimes almost like anticipations and foreshadowings of the peculiar and mysterious disclosures of the Gospel. But, after all, they were only speculations. These philosophers had no standard of Truth; no external testimony, no authenticated facts on which to base their reasonings. And the human mind

demands *facts, proofs, authority*. It cannot rest on speculations, however ingenious; it cannot feed on cobwebs spun out of its own substance.

A Truth which is not proved, is, as to its effect upon us, as a Truth which does not exist. And as to Moral and Theological Truth, nothing was proved in that old pagan world. What one Philosopher advanced, another denied. The disciple always felt himself wiser than his master; and when he in his turn set himself to be a teacher, his first task was to demolish the edifice his predecessor had reared, in order to clear the ground for his own structure.

In such a state of things, there could be no deep and earnest Faith. The most essential and sacred truths came, after a while, to be regarded as mere theories; ingenious perhaps, plausible, beautiful, but not certain; which their very advocates maintained with a peradventure.

It was under such influences, practical and speculative, that Pilate was reared; and as a Soldier and a Courtier, he probably partook of them to the full. When Jesus spoke of Truth; that is, of Religious Truth; He seemed to Pilate to babble. What cared Pilate for Truth? How ~~did~~ he know that there was any truth, except such as his bodily senses attested? He knew that Falernian wine had, in its way, a sort of

truth; there was reality in it. And so with a well-filled purse; and a retinue of slaves; and a marble palace at Rome; and a sea-side villa on the Campanian shore. And he knew very well that he had a master who was cruel and suspicious to the last degree; who, for very slight cause, would consign him to the dungeon or the block.

He seems to have been heartily desirous, especially after his discourse with our Lord, to spare the blood of that Innocent One who stood before him. But, how can he safely do this? The Prisoner indeed tells him that He is a witness for the Truth. But, what of that? What will Truth avail him if he discharge the accused person? Will Truth calm a violent and factious mob, urged on by crafty and unscrupulous hypocrites? Will Truth satisfy a sanguinary Despot, who revels in human blood like a tiger? In short, is Truth of any practical value? is it worth any thing in the market? Has it ever fed a man, or clothed him, or turned the edge of an executioner's axe? In short, "What is Truth?" impatiently and scornfully asks Pontius Pilate.

And are there none who speak the same language at the present day, at least in heart? Depend upon it, there are many. Our age is a vicious age, if Murder, Adultery, Burglary, Rob-

bery, Peculation, Fraud, Theft, and Imposture constitute vice. Our age is controversial also. We generally call ourselves Christians, but we dispute about the very first principles of Christianity; and in all the little villages in our land, not large enough, frequently, for a single vigorous congregation, there are usually three, four, five, or six religious parties, watching each other, contending with each other, and, not unfrequently, reviling each other. What is the result? Charity is cold, and Faith weak; for how can Faith be strong in tenets that are merely the foot-balls of contending parties? When religious Truth is presented, not so much to be believed and acted on, as to be discussed and argued for; what result is possible except that there can be no deep Faith? Many persons seem to think, like Pilate, that there is no such thing as Truth; or what is equivalent, that there is no means of ascertaining it; for "a Truth not proved, is to us as a Truth which does not exist."

There are many persons, however, who, having no hope of ascertaining religious Truth, rest now in the opinion that, in inquiries concerning religion, Truth is not important, but only a sincere belief of what we profess to believe. It is thought neither reasonable nor charitable, to condemn a man for religious error, if he hold it

sincerely. Sincerity, in short, is made the same thing with Truth.

But, are they the same thing? Truth, without sincerity, will, of course, avail us nothing; but of what avail will sincerity be, without Truth? If that were sufficient; how unreasonable and unjust was it in St. Paul, to call himself the chief of sinners, because he persecuted the Church of God! for, at the time he did this, he sincerely believed he was thereby doing God service. If sincerity, without Truth, will suffice, what charge can be brought against Bonner, or Torquemada, or Julian the Apostate, or the very Scribes and Pharisees who imbrued their hands in the Saviour's blood, and reviled Him on the cross? Who can say that these men were insincere in their detestable principles of conduct? If sincerity without Truth will suffice, what evil is there in being a Turk, or a Heathen, if we only bring ourselves sincerely to embrace these foul superstitions? But the principle, if true, ought to be carried further. What harm is there in being a robber, or a murderer, if we can only sear the conscience, and blunt the moral sense enough to consider robbery and murder lawful? The French demagogue, Marat, compared with whom Robespierre was forgiving, and Danton merciful, expressed, during one of

the paroxysms of the Great Revolution, the conviction, that the only effectual remedy for the evils of the country was, to cut off the heads of two hundred and sixty thousand Aristocrats. He was denounced before the National Convention for thus instigating wholesale massacre. His reply was very short and plain. "*It is,*" said he, "*my opinion.*" No doubt it was. He had reached that point of wickedness, that, like a wolf, he loved blood for its own sake. But, what reply could be made to him, if sincerity be the same thing with Truth?

Such views, when pushed to their consequences, make the worst men the best; for it is the worst men who most sincerely believe their own conduct to be entirely right, because they know no difference between right and wrong, between good and evil.

Be assured, my friends, in order to be right—in order to be safe—it is not enough to be sincere; it is necessary to hold the Truth sincerely. There *is* such a thing as Truth, whatever skeptics, whatever sensualists may say to the contrary.

It has an existence independent of all that men think concerning it. If we shut our eyes to the sun, we do not extinguish it thereby, it still shines on; so, if we remain ignorant of the

Truth, or reject it, it still subsists. Nay, if the whole world agrees to deny it, it still subsists. It is indeed immortal. Religious Truth is the transcript of the Eternal Ideas in the mind of God. Error is of the earth, earthy. Error is perishable. Error is like the false lights of a morass, which dance about the traveller's path, only to lead him astray, and themselves speedily to disappear. Truth is like the light of the stars which shine on the mariner as they shone on his Tyrian predecessor thousands of years ago, to guide him on his course, and conduct him in safety to the haven where he would be.

Well, then, may the wise man say: "Buy the truth and sell it not." Buy it at any price; sell it at no price. Buy it with toil, with obloquy, with suffering, with danger. Sell it not for money, nor fame, nor safety, nor popularity, nor life.

Truth is the proper, the appointed food and medicine for the soul. The soul of man was made to receive the Truth, as his bodily eye the light; and as light is sweet to the eye, so is Truth delightful to the soul. The perception of a new Truth cheers, exalts, and invigorates the soul. And this is especially applicable to religious Truth. Religious Truth is that which per-

tains to God, to the spirit of man, to Eternity Of all Truth, this is the grandest, the noblest, the most refreshing. It is this especially which strengthens the powers, and moulds the character, and purifies the nature. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth," says our Saviour. And religious error is, consequently, of all errors, the most dangerous, the most debasing, the most to be deplored. There is no question then so vital as, **HOW SHALL WE ASCERTAIN RELIGIOUS TRUTH?**

In pursuance of the subject, I propose, therefore, to consider the grounds and tests of religious Truth.

When we remember the infinite importance of the question: What is Truth? and how peculiarly He to whom it was addressed by Pontius Pilate was fitted to answer it, we cannot but lament that the proud and sensual Governor did not wait for a reply, but rose up and left his question unresolved; thereby cutting himself off, and us likewise, from the benefits of that reply which Divine Wisdom might have vouchsafed. This is our first, spontaneous feeling. But when we consider our Lord's discourses, we find that He has not left us in entire ignorance, or even in any serious doubt on this vital subject. He, and His Apostles speaking by His Spirit, have, on a plain and fair interpretation of their lan-

guage, pointed out a method by which we may ascertain all religious Truth that it is indispensable, or even in a high degree important for us to know. He has told us, in the first place, what is the repository of Truth; the fountain from which its waters flow. He says to His Heavenly Father: "Sanctify them through Thy Truth. Thy Word is Truth." He recognizes here the function of Truth to sanctify, and He points out the very spring from which we are to draw the purifying stream. It is the Word of God. We may then be assured, that all Truth necessary for man's sanctification here, and for his salvation hereafter, is contained in God's Word.

And this would seem to result from the very idea of a Divine Revelation to mankind for their spiritual good. Such a Revelation must be effectual to its end, because it comes from God, and therefore it must contain all that is necessary to salvation. And to this agrees the saying of St. Paul: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But, though Scripture certainly contains all essential religious Truth, is it certain that they who read the Scriptures draw therefrom this

saving Truth, pure and undefiled? What is the language of Scripture itself on this subject? While the Inspired Writers profess to teach Truth, nothing but Truth, and all necessary Truth; they yet warn us, that they may be so misinterpreted, that the water of life may be so tinctured by the vessel which receives it as to convey poison, rather than to heal the soul. "We are," say they, "a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other, the savor of life unto life." And so again, elsewhere it is said, that there are in Scripture "many things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest to their own destruction." This then is the testimony of Scripture as to its own effect: that, though true and divine, and, to him who rightly receives it, sanctifying and saving, it is not necessarily or universally so; but that, because of the ignorance or perversity of the hearer, it is sometimes a source of error, and even of fatal, ruinous error.

How do we find it in point of fact? Is this warning verified by experience? Incontestably it is.

Where there are opposite interpretations of Scripture, one, at least, must be wrong. Now,

consider the contrarieties of belief among persons who all suppose that they draw their Faith from Scripture.

There is a large body who understand the Scriptures as teaching Transubstantiation, Purgatory, Worship of the Saints and Adoration of the Virgin Mary. Another large class of persons, so far from seeing authority for these doctrines in Scripture, see there, as they believe, the plainest and strongest condemnation of them. There are those again, who infer from Scripture that Jesus was but a man, and that the Holy Ghost is but an influence. Others, on the contrary, are persuaded by the same Scriptures, that Jesus Christ is Very God, and that the Holy Ghost is Personally God.

Now, one party or the other in this latter controversy, for instance, does certainly mistake the whole sense of Scripture; for every doctrine of Christ's religion depends upon what Christ Himself was. The entire meaning of the Gospel then, as we receive it, rests on what we think of Christ. But the sense of Revelation is the Revelation. The book is but paper, with characters inscribed on it. The words in themselves are but sounds or marks. The sense, the thing said, is that which is revealed. When, then, two men differ entirely about their religion, they

have two different religions. If, for example, Unitarians are right, Trinitarians are idolaters; if Trinitarians are right, Unitarians are unbelievers.

Here, then, and in many other instances, we have different classes of persons, drawing opposite conclusions from the same Scriptural teachings, and one side or the other necessarily falling into error, which must be frequently fatal error.

How, then, shall we know what is Truth in the interpretation of Scripture? The Scripture is, indeed, authenticated by miracles, prophecies, by its own tenor, and by its effects. Truth is there; but how shall we find it, and know that we have found it? The treasure is, beyond doubt, in the field, but how shall our feet be guided with certainty to the precious deposite? Yet, it is all-important to find it. We must draw from Scripture, Truth or Error; and what we want is Truth. Error does not feed the soul, it poisons it. Error does not sanctify, it pollutes, it corrupts. Error does not save, it destroys. What then is Truth? How shall we ascertain it?

There are two means which we may employ, and which ought to be combined, that, if faithfully used, will, as I am persuaded, and can

prove to you, lead us to all essential Truth, and I may, perhaps, safely say, to all important Christian truth.

First, then, *in the interpretation of Scripture, give great weight to that meaning which has been universally held in the Church of Christ; and, in matters essential to salvation, in the groundwork of the Faith, acknowledge and bow to its conclusive Authority.*

For, consider how we stand in regard to it. Our Saviour has promised the aids of His Spirit to all who sincerely seek to know the Truth. "Ask," says He, "and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." And so says the Apostle: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." If, then, any man were purely candid, thoroughly earnest, perfectly unbiased in seeking Divine light and wisdom, it would be communicated to him without any taint of error. But no man is thus perfect in the spirit in which he seeks wisdom. We live in an atmosphere of opinion, prejudice, passion and interest, which refracts and distorts, to a greater or less extent, the rays of Divine Truth shining in upon the mind. No man, therefore, is right in all his opinions, that is, no man is infallible.

But yet, he who sincerely seeks to know the Truth, and prays to be led to it, has, by the promise of Christ, some ground to hope when he has arrived at a conclusion, that it is a true one. A certain measure of probability attaches to his judgment, because it is his judgment. But, as the promise is made to no one in particular, but to every one who uses the appointed means, if the result which one comes to in the use of these means is *probably* the truth, there is, at least, *a double probability* of the truth of that result at which two arrive: perhaps more than a double probability, because Truth is but one, and error manifold. When, then, twenty independent inquirers, all using faithfully the means which Christ has promised to bless, come to one conclusion, the probability that this is the right conclusion is immensely enhanced.

How is it, then, when many millions believe the same thing? How is it, when the great body of Christians are led to believe in one interpretation of Scripture as its true meaning? How is it, when they come to this conclusion in different countries, states of society, degrees of civilization, while holding adverse opinions on other subjects? How is it, when the dead are united with the living in bearing testimony to a certain interpretation of Scripture, as that to

which Christ by His Spirit has guided them? When to the present generation, we add the sixty generations of the past, the thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand from the Apostolic age to our own day, who, having labored in faith and hope, have now gone to their rest in peace and joy, and who, with considerable diversities of opinion as to many doctrines and usages, have yet agreed in *the Faith*, in the principles, the foundation of Divine Truth; what can we say, but that these have obtained what they sought, and that we are safe in following them?

And this, too, for another reason. This great "cloud of witnesses," who all attest the same essential Gospel, comprehend among them the purest and holiest representatives of Christianity; the Martyrs, the great Saints, the men of whom the world was not worthy. This is indisputable, and indeed, is undenied, that the men whom all Christians delight to honor, were men who believed in the ancient, generally received creed of Christendom; that they were not eccentric in their religion; that they were not innovators on the Faith.

What, then, is the spectacle we witness? That men believing a certain form of sound words, holding a distinct, definite, and historical

Faith, the Faith of all Christian ages and all Christian countries ; that these men have been the champions of the Cross, most holy in their tempers, and most heavenly in their lives. But Jesus Christ said it was the nature of His Truth to sanctify. These men were sanctified. What inference then is left, but that what they believed is the Truth ?

The great Physician tells us that His medicine is to produce a certain extraordinary result. The result is produced. What can we, if we revere Him, what can we believe, but that the medicine employed was that which He provided ; that the doctrine which purified, was the doctrine He taught ?

Surely it is incredible, it is impossible, that the Saints, Confessors, and Martyrs of Christianity were all mistaken in the very groundwork of that Faith, in the strength of which they lived, and in honor of which they died.

Now, this united testimony to the Truth, is what we mean by the voice of the Church. And, that we may see that its authority does not rest merely on the principles of reason, let us remember the declaration of St. Paul : that "the Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the Truth ;" sustains it, upholds it, proclaims it.

What then shall be thought of the humility and reasonableness of that man, who, on some cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, opposes his individual opinion, or that of some little ephemeral sect to which he belongs, to the testimony of the general Church of God? Why, the very act is his own sentence of condemnation. It proves nothing about the doctrine, but it proves much as to him; that he is that proud and haughty scorner, who is self-disqualified from understanding the Word and the ways of Christ. For it is "the meek He will guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach His way;" and except we become "as little children," we cannot enter His kingdom. This single consideration is enough to satisfy us of the utter fallacy of all new-fangled opinions in religion; whether we call them developments, as the Romanists do; or discoveries, as the founders of new sects proclaim their notions to be.

This line of thought applies mainly to *the Faith*; that is, to the elementary and essential principles of the Gospel. Concerning these we may say, they are settled by manifold testimonies of Scripture, understood in the same sense by the great body of the faithful of all times and countries; and he who endeavors to unsettle them, is an adversary to the

Truth as it is in Jesus, and an enemy of our souls.

But, besides these great and indispensable truths, there are very important doctrines of the Gospel, not, perhaps, essential to our salvation, but yet comforting and strengthening and purifying when made known to us. How shall we, as to these, ascertain what is Truth?

Undoubtedly, our first duty is to use diligently all the means of ascertaining the true sense of Scripture, which Providence has placed in our power. The God of Scripture, is the God of Providence. If, then, He gives us a book, which it is oftentimes hard to understand, and at the same time, provides us with means to understand it, He surely thereby intimates to us that we must use these means. A man who meets with some difficulty in Scripture, but yet makes no careful inquiry, searches for no collateral source of light, but leaps to some explanation which he is then prepared to maintain to be the true one; this man, in effect, has rejected the help which God offers him, and has no right to believe that God has guided him to his conclusion.

God guides those only who observe the way-marks He has set up: and if the careless inquirer even pray for wisdom to understand the Scrip-

tures, he has no right to expect a favorable answer to his prayers. Prayer unaccompanied by the use of means is a mockery of God, not a reverent worship offered Him. The husbandman who prays for a harvest, while he does not cultivate his fields, exhibits, not piety, but presumption. And he who seeks to know the meaning of Scripture, and neglects to use all available means which may assist him to understand it, is likely to wander on in darkness: nay, his darkness will be the more profound because he supposes he has found the light.

So, then, when at a loss as to the meaning of God's Word, it is our plain duty to compare Scripture with Scripture, to use, as far as we can, the labors of the wise, and the learned, and the pious, who have investigated the same subject. We must inquire whether there has been in the Church a settled interpretation of a doubtful passage, or a clear definition of one that is obscure; and if we find such, although not absolutely bound by it, in matters not "*de fide*," not fundamental truths; yet we must always respect it and allow it great weight.

Having thus informed ourselves; having thus prepared the materials for judgment; we must humbly and earnestly cast ourselves upon God to help us, and pray Him to enlighten our judg-

ment and guide us to the Truth. Then may we well hope that prayers offered up in the spirit of docility will be graciously heard; and that to us will be fulfilled those words of encouragement: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Now, let me briefly sum up what I have been teaching.

1st. That all moral and religious truth important to mankind and essential to our welfare, is contained in Holy Scripture; so that, in the language of our Article, "Whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith; or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Tradition then, the writings of the Fathers, the decrees of councils and the like, however valuable for other purposes (and for some important purposes they are very valuable), are yet, not a part of Revelation, nor a source of Divine Truth.

2dly. In the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the voice of the Church, in all ages, is always authoritative and sometimes conclusive. It is conclusive in doctrines essential to salvation. The Church of Christ as a whole cannot have erred in the essentials of salvation, otherwise,

the great body of believers have perished because of their Faith; which is plainly inconsistent with the very purposes for which the Church was given, and with Christ's promise to be with it to the end of the world, and that the gates of Hell should not prevail against it. This principle is fatal to all new lights in religion, especially to such as bear on essential doctrines.

3dly. In understanding doctrines not essential to salvation, and yet important, it is necessary to use human means, together with earnest, hearty prayer for Divine guidance. And yet even here, a large measure of respect and deference is due to the uniform and distinct teachings of the Church. Now, the Church of Christ has summed up those doctrines which she judges essential to salvation in her Creeds. These we must receive at our soul's peril. There are others as to which her testimony throughout the ages and throughout the world is also distinct and plain, although they are not placed by her on the same ground of necessity with the truths of the Creed. These are the lawfulness and usefulness of Infant Baptism, and of Confirmation; the Apostolic Succession in the Ministry; the divine origin and obligation of the Eucharist and the like.



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Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 1.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

BY

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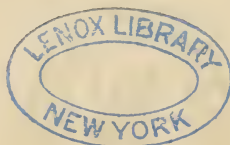
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WHAT IS TRUTH?

THIS question was asked of Him, who came into the world specially to bear witness to the Truth, and who is Himself essentially the Truth; its object, as well as its Revealer. He who propounded the question, was unhappy, impious Pilate.

The Saviour of mankind was then experiencing the fulfilment of those prophecies which announced His deepest humiliation and misery. Deserted and denied by His disciples, He had already been dragged before one and another unjust tribunal. At the bar of Caiaphas He had endured a mock trial, and been condemned without evidence. But the malice of His enemies had outstripped their power. Though they could condemn, they could not execute their sentence; for "the Sceptre had now departed

from Judah, and the Lawgiver from between his feet."

In this dilemma, then, the infuriated Priests and Levites sacrifice the sentiments and instincts which heretofore had been the most cherished, and the most powerful in their bosoms; their jealousy of heathen interference in their national, and, especially, in their Ecclesiastical government; their abhorrence of that stern Roman domination which humiliated, even more than it oppressed them. They sacrifice even these powerful passions to that furious and almost diabolical hatred of the Holy Jesus which had become the master-principle; which had now, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up, as it were, the other serpents that infested their bosoms.

Urged on by this rage, they appeal, of their own accord, to that Jurisdiction, which, at other times, they were willing to shed their blood rather than acknowledge; they demand of the Roman Governor the death of their prisoner. Pontius Pilate thus appealed to, is greatly at a loss. He knew, none better, the wickedness of these men, and he, no doubt, scorned, like Gallio, all these questions concerning their Law; a Law which he never heard invoked except in the interests of spiritual pride, ambition, or malice. But he himself was far from being immaculate,

and he dreaded to provoke still further the hostility of men whom he had hitherto repeatedly outraged, and who were already demanding at the Imperial Court his recall and disgrace.

His feelings of justice and duty point one way; his apparent interest another. What shall he do?

He seeks, in the first instance, to extract from our Saviour's own lips a justification of the course which his interest prompts him to pursue. But our Lord, who thoroughly reads his heart, will not allow him thus to hide his baseness. Observe, in this point of view, the questions which Pilate asks, and the answers he receives. "Art thou," says he, "the king of the Jews?" If Jesus Christ now merely says, yes, as in effect He had often before done; if now He says, simply and absolutely, yes; then Pilate can at once condemn Him as guilty of high treason, as the rival of Cæsar. Our Saviour, with admirable wisdom, replies: "My kingdom is not of this world." His authority, then, is in no respect antagonistic to that of Cæsar, nor a just object of jealousy to the officers of Cæsar; for Cæsar's authority is of this world. This world is the only world for which Cæsar cares; the only world in which Cæsar believes. And our Lord goes on further to explain that His king-

dom is a moral and spiritual one; that He rules by the power of Truth, and that all who are of the Truth obey Him.

To this Pilate replies, "What is Truth?" What does the unhappy man mean by this question? Does he ask in good faith, in an humble and teachable spirit, that he may really learn the doctrines of the remarkable Person who then stood before him; and, if they commended themselves to his reason and conscience, embrace them? Alas! unhappily for him, this could not have been his meaning; for he does not even wait for an answer, but immediately goes out, this question unresolved.

I think it clear that he is speaking in the spirit of irony and derision, and his question is itself a sarcasm. It is as if he had said to his prisoner, Yours is indeed, by your own account of it, a notable mission! You poor man, whom the menials buffet, whom the very abjects trample on; you have come to bear witness to the Truth! What is this truth? Who knows it? When was it ascertained? There are opinions without number, one, perhaps, as good and as certain as another. But Truth, free, absolute Truth, who knows it? What is it?

This simple question reveals to us the man who asked it. As a flash of lightning in a dark

night gleams upon a man approaching us, and enables us in an instant to recognize his person and countenance; so these three words of Pontius Pilate disclose to us his state of mind, and character; for three words spoken in an earnest moment are worth three years of common-place talk, in enabling us to know a man. In these words we recognize the utterance of a troubled spirit, which doubts every thing; which sees no certainty but what the senses teach. Men of this sort may be found in all ages and states of society; but they are particularly abundant in an age, which is, on the one hand, sensual and luxurious, and on the other, inquisitive and enlightened. Such was the Augustan age in Rome; such was the 18th century in France; such, I cannot but believe, is the existing era in our own country.

The state of mind characteristic of these periods is not natural to man, but is a disease, the result of an artificial and corrupt condition of Society. Faith is natural to man; in saying which, however, I do not refer to Christian Faith, for that, we are expressly taught, is the gift of God in a special and supernatural sense (as indeed it must be supernatural, being the recipient and correlative of a supernatural Revelation). But I here speak of Faith, in its strictest

and most elementary sense, as the power of believing on testimony. This is an original faculty of our nature of the highest worth and most indispensable necessity, which may be affected and influenced by reason, by prejudice, and by passion, but has an origin independent of them all, and may work apart from other faculties, or concurrently with them. I call Faith a power. Many look on it as not much more than a weakness, confounding it with credulity. But it is in fact the power, by which a man is fitted for life, as well as for eternity. What can a man accomplish without Faith? Our daily life rests on Faith. We go forth to our work in Faith, *believing* that we shall be permitted to perform it; *believing* that, in some way, we shall be rewarded for it; *believing* that, after it, we shall be allowed rest and refreshment. We sleep in Faith, confiding in our safety; *believing* that no robber or assassin is at hand to destroy us. We eat in Faith, *believing* that our viands contain no deadly poison, no nauseous mixture. We learn by Faith. To what does History appeal but to Faith? To what Geography? To what Language? To what every thing, in short, save pure Science? Love rests on Faith. Without Faith, conjugal love curdles into jealousy, or blazes out into fiery wrath. Without Faith,

parental love withers and dies away. We live, even in this world, in an atmosphere of Faith, and as that becomes diluted, we faint; were it exhausted, we perish.

And while Faith is thus necessary for our temporal well-being, it is more especially the instrument of our spiritual life. God, Providence, Redemption, Eternity, Judgment, Heaven and Hell are perceived and realized only by the light of Faith. It is, to use the grand expression of an Apostle, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

This faculty of Faith was, no doubt, like the other powers and excellencies of man, perfect in our state of primeval integrity and holiness, and has been weakened by the Fall. Even now we may observe, that it is vigorous and active in proportion to the purity and innocence of him who exercises it. Observe, for example, a young child, in whose bosom sin still lies dormant, and whose face is yet bright with the reflection of Heaven; observe him at his mother's knee. With what unquestioning and absorbing Faith he listens to the tale she tells him, the counsels and instructions she imparts! How does he drink in nourishment from her soul, as when an infant he had imbibed it from her body; and how absolutely he yields himself to the impres-

sion which she desires to make! But alas! as he advances in life; as he finds himself in an untruthful and treacherous world; as he detects the falsehoods that are told him; and still more, as he himself becomes corrupt and capable of deceiving; he becomes likewise suspicious, skeptical, and incapable of believing. For falsehood in ourselves and Faith in others, are necessary and perpetual antagonists.

Society is made up of individuals. It follows then, as a necessary consequence, that when this individual deterioration becomes general, Society is corrupted, and Faith dissolves and dies out in its midst.

It was not by any arbitrary, or accidental connection, that the profligacy of French Society in the early and middle parts of the 18th century, was succeeded by the infidelity and Atheism, which so darkened and desolated that Society in the last few years of the same century. Kings, Priests, and Nobles had sowed the wind, and in due time, they reaped the whirlwind. The principles and practices of vice were with them the Dragon's teeth; Anarchy and Atheism were the armed men that sprang therefrom.

A tendency to unbelief is strengthened by other influences, with which we are experimentally very well acquainted.

When Truth is the subject of continued disputation and discussion; when every article of a people's Creed is alternately attacked and defended; when the tide of controversy ebbs at one point, only to swell at another; then Faith wavers; then, flitting over these angry waters, like the Dove in the Deluge, she finds no resting-place, and withdraws from the tumultuous scene.

It was at such a period that unhappy Pilate lived. His was a vicious age, and it was, moreover, a controversial age. The remains of Classical Antiquity which have come down to us from that period, admirable as they are for genius, and taste, and exquisite felicity of language, yet indicate a moral unsoundness scarcely to be conceived by those who live under Christian influences.

And as to Religious Truth, all was doubt and uncertainty. The speculations of some of the Philosophers, if not borrowed from Asia, and ultimately from Judea, were wonderful efforts of the human mind; sometimes almost like anticipations and foreshadowings of the peculiar and mysterious disclosures of the Gospel. But, after all, they were only speculations. These philosophers had no standard of Truth; no external testimony, no authenticated facts on which to base their reasonings. And the human mind

demands *facts, proofs, authority*. It cannot rest on speculations, however ingenious; it cannot feed on cobwebs spun out of its own substance.

A Truth which is not proved, is, as to its effect upon us, as a Truth which does not exist. And as to Moral and Theological Truth, nothing was proved in that old pagan world. What one Philosopher advanced, another denied. The disciple always felt himself wiser than his master; and when he in his turn set himself to be a teacher, his first task was to demolish the edifice his predecessor had reared, in order to clear the ground for his own structure.

In such a state of things, there could be no deep and earnest Faith. The most essential and sacred truths came, after a while, to be regarded as mere theories; ingenious perhaps, plausible, beautiful, but not certain; which their very advocates maintained with a peradventure.

It was under such influences, practical and speculative, that Pilate was reared; and as a Soldier and a Courtier, he probably partook of them to the full. When Jesus spoke of Truth; that is, of Religious Truth; He seemed to Pilate to babble. What cared Pilate for Truth? How did he know that there was any truth, except such as his bodily senses attested? He knew that Falernian wine had, in its way, a sort of

truth; there was reality in it. And so with a well-filled purse; and a retinue of slaves; and a marble palace at Rome; and a sea-side villa on the Campanian shore. And he knew very well that he had a master who was cruel and suspicious to the last degree; who, for very slight cause, would consign him to the dungeon or the block.

He seems to have been heartily desirous, especially after his discourse with our Lord, to spare the blood of that Innocent One who stood before him. But, how can he safely do this? The Prisoner indeed tells him that He is a witness for the Truth. But, what of that? What will Truth avail him if he discharge the accused person? Will Truth calm a violent and factious mob, urged on by crafty and unscrupulous hypocrites? Will Truth satisfy a sanguinary Despot, who revels in human blood like a tiger? In short, is Truth of any practical value? is it worth any thing in the market? Has it ever fed a man, or clothed him, or turned the edge of an executioner's axe? In short, "What is Truth?" impatiently and scornfully asks Pontius Pilate.

And are there none who speak the same language at the present day, at least in heart? Depend upon it, there are many. Our age is a vicious age, if Murder, Adultery, Burglary, Rob-

bery, Peculation, Fraud, Theft, and Imposture constitute vice. Our age is controversial also. We generally call ourselves Christians, but we dispute about the very first principles of Christianity; and in all the little villages in our land, not large enough, frequently, for a single vigorous congregation, there are usually three, four, five, or six religious parties, watching each other, contending with each other, and, not unfrequently, reviling each other. What is the result? Charity is cold, and Faith weak; for how can Faith be strong in tenets that are merely the foot-balls of contending parties? When religious Truth is presented, not so much to be believed and acted on, as to be discussed and argued for; what result is possible except that there can be no deep Faith? Many persons seem to think, like Pilate, that there is no such thing as Truth; or what is equivalent, that there is no means of ascertaining it; for "a Truth not proved, is to us as a Truth which does not exist."

There are many persons, however, who, having no hope of ascertaining religious Truth, rest now in the opinion that, in inquiries concerning religion, Truth is not important, but only a sincere belief of what we profess to believe. It is thought neither reasonable nor charitable, to condemn a man for religious error, if he hold it

sincerely. Sincerity, in short, is made the same thing with Truth.

But, are they the same thing? Truth, without sincerity, will, of course, avail us nothing; but of what avail will sincerity be, without Truth? If that were sufficient, how unreasonable and unjust was it in St. Paul, to call himself the chief of sinners, because he persecuted the Church of God! for, at the time he did this, he sincerely believed he was thereby doing God service. If sincerity, without Truth, will suffice, what charge can be brought against Bonner, or Torquemada, or Julian the Apostate, or the very Scribes and Pharisees who imbrued their hands in the Saviour's blood, and reviled Him on the cross? Who can say that these men were insincere in their detestable principles of conduct? If sincerity without Truth will suffice, what evil is there in being a Turk, or a Heathen, if we only bring ourselves sincerely to embrace these foul superstitions? But the principle, if true, ought to be carried further. What harm is there in being a robber, or a murderer, if we can only sear the conscience, and blunt the moral sense enough to consider robbery and murder lawful? The French demagogue, Marat, compared with whom Robespierre was forgiving, and Danton merciful, expressed, during one of

the paroxysms of the Great Revolution, the conviction, that the only effectual remedy for the evils of the country was, to cut off the heads of two hundred and sixty thousand Aristocrats. He was denounced before the National Convention for thus instigating wholesale massacre. His reply was very short and plain. "*It is,*" said he, "*my opinion.*" No doubt it was. He had reached that point of wickedness, that, like a wolf, he loved blood for its own sake. But, what reply could be made to him, if sincerity be the same thing with Truth?

Such views, when pushed to their consequences, make the worst men the best; for it is the worst men who most sincerely believe their own conduct to be entirely right, because they know no difference between right and wrong, between good and evil.

Be assured, my friends, in order to be right—in order to be safe—it is not enough to be sincere; it is necessary to hold the Truth sincerely. There *is* such a thing as Truth, whatever skeptics, whatever sensualists may say to the contrary.

It has an existence independent of all that men think concerning it. If we shut our eyes to the sun, we do not extinguish it thereby, it still shines on; so, if we remain ignorant of the

Truth, or reject it, it still subsists. Nay, if the whole world agrees to deny it, it still subsists. It is indeed immortal. Religious Truth is the transcript of the Eternal Ideas in the mind of God. Error is of the earth, earthy. Error is perishable. Error is like the false lights of a morass, which dance about the traveller's path, only to lead him astray, and themselves speedily to disappear. Truth is like the light of the stars which shine on the mariner as they shone on his Tyrian predecessor thousands of years ago, to guide him on his course, and conduct him in safety to the haven where he would be.

Well, then, may the wise man say: "Buy the truth and sell it not." Buy it at any price; sell it at no price. Buy it with toil, with obloquy, with suffering, with danger. Sell it not for money, nor fame, nor safety, nor popularity, nor life.

Truth is the proper, the appointed food and medicine for the soul. The soul of man was made to receive the Truth, as his bodily eye the light; and as light is sweet to the eye, so is Truth delightful to the soul. The perception of a new Truth cheers, exalts, and invigorates the soul. And this is especially applicable to religious Truth. Religious Truth is that which per-

tains to God, to the spirit of man, to Eternity Of all Truth, this is the grandest, the noblest, the most refreshing. It is this especially which strengthens the powers, and moulds the character, and purifies the nature. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth," says our Saviour. And religious error is, consequently, of all errors, the most dangerous, the most debasing, the most to be deplored. There is no question then so vital as, HOW SHALL WE ASCERTAIN RELIGIOUS TRUTH?

In pursuance of the subject, I propose, therefore, to consider the grounds and tests of religious Truth.

When we remember the infinite importance of the question: What is Truth? and how peculiarly He to whom it was addressed by Pontius Pilate was fitted to answer it, we cannot but lament that the proud and sensual Governor did not wait for a reply, but rose up and left his question unresolved; thereby cutting himself off, and us likewise, from the benefits of that reply which Divine Wisdom might have vouchsafed. This is our first, spontaneous feeling. But when we consider our Lord's discourses, we find that He has not left us in entire ignorance, or even in any serious doubt on this vital subject. He, and His Apostles speaking by His Spirit, have, on a plain and fair interpretation of their lan-

guage, pointed out a method by which we may ascertain all religious Truth that it is indispensable, or even in a high degree important for us to know. He has told us, in the first place, what is the repository of Truth; the fountain from which its waters flow. He says to His Heavenly Father: "Sanctify them through Thy Truth. Thy Word is Truth." He recognizes here the function of Truth to sanctify, and He points out the very spring from which we are to draw the purifying stream. It is the Word of God. We may then be assured, that all Truth necessary for man's sanctification here, and for his salvation hereafter, is contained in God's Word.

And this would seem to result from the very idea of a Divine Revelation to mankind for their spiritual good. Such a Revelation must be effectual to its end, because it comes from God, and therefore it must contain all that is necessary to salvation. And to this agrees the saying of St. Paul: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But, though Scripture certainly contains all essential religious Truth, is it certain that they who read the Scriptures draw therefrom this

saving Truth, pure and undefiled? What is the language of Scripture itself on this subject? While the Inspired Writers profess to teach Truth, nothing but Truth, and all necessary Truth; they yet warn us, that they may be so misinterpreted, that the water of life may be so tinctured by the vessel which receives it as to convey poison, rather than to heal the soul. "We are," say they, "a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other, the savor of life unto life." And so again, elsewhere it is said, that there are in Scripture "many things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest to their own destruction." This then is the testimony of Scripture as to its own effect: that, though true and divine, and, to him who rightly receives it, sanctifying and saving, it is not necessarily or universally so; but that, because of the ignorance or perversity of the hearer, it is sometimes a source of error, and even of fatal, ruinous error.

How do we find it in point of fact? Is this warning verified by experience? Incontestably it is.

Where there are opposite interpretations of Scripture, one, at least, must be wrong. Now,

consider the contrarieties of belief among persons who all suppose that they draw their Faith from Scripture.

There is a large body who understand the Scriptures as teaching Transubstantiation, Purgatory, Worship of the Saints and Adoration of the Virgin Mary. Another large class of persons, so far from seeing authority for these doctrines in Scripture, see there, as they believe, the plainest and strongest condemnation of them. There are those again, who infer from Scripture that Jesus was but a man, and that the Holy Ghost is but an influence. Others, on the contrary, are persuaded by the same Scriptures, that Jesus Christ is Very God, and that the Holy Ghost is Personally God.

Now, one party or the other in this latter controversy, for instance, does certainly mistake the whole sense of Scripture; for every doctrine of Christ's religion depends upon what Christ Himself was. The entire meaning of the Gospel then, as we receive it, rests on what we think of Christ. But the sense of Revelation is the Revelation. The book is but paper, with characters inscribed on it. The words in themselves are but sounds or marks. The sense, the thing said, is that which is revealed. When, then, two men differ entirely about their religion, they

have two different religions. If, for example, Unitarians are right, Trinitarians are idolaters; if Trinitarians are right, Unitarians are unbelievers.

Here, then, and in many other instances, we have different classes of persons, drawing opposite conclusions from the same Scriptural teachings, and one side or the other necessarily falling into error, which must be frequently fatal error.

How, then, shall we know what is Truth in the interpretation of Scripture? The Scripture is, indeed, authenticated by miracles, prophecies, by its own tenor, and by its effects. Truth is there; but how shall we find it, and know that we have found it? The treasure is, beyond doubt, in the field, but how shall our feet be guided with certainty to the precious deposit? Yet, it is all-important to find it. We must draw from Scripture, Truth or Error; and what we want is Truth. Error does not feed the soul, it poisons it. Error does not sanctify, it pollutes, it corrupts. Error does not save, it destroys. What then is Truth? How shall we ascertain it?

There are two means which we may employ, and which ought to be combined, that, if faithfully used, will, as I am persuaded, and can

prove to you, lead us to all essential Truth, and I may, perhaps, safely say, to all important Christian truth.

First, then, *in the interpretation of Scripture, give great weight to that meaning which has been universally held in the Church of Christ; and, in matters essential to salvation, in the groundwork of the Faith, acknowledge and bow to its conclusive Authority.*

For, consider how we stand in regard to it. Our Saviour has promised the aids of His Spirit to all who sincerely seek to know the Truth. "Ask," says He, "and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." And so says the Apostle: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." If, then, any man were purely candid, thoroughly earnest, perfectly unbiased in seeking Divine light and wisdom, it would be communicated to him without any taint of error. But no man is thus perfect in the spirit in which he seeks wisdom. We live in an atmosphere of opinion, prejudice, passion and interest, which refracts and distorts, to a greater or less extent, the rays of Divine Truth shining in upon the mind. No man, therefore, is right in all his opinions, that is, no man is infallible.

But yet, he who sincerely seeks to know the Truth, and prays to be led to it, has, by the promise of Christ, some ground to hope when he has arrived at a conclusion, that it is a true one. A certain measure of probability attaches to his judgment, because it is his judgment. But, as the promise is made to no one in particular, but to every one who uses the appointed means, if the result which one comes to in the use of these means is *probably* the truth, there is, at least, *a double probability* of the truth of that result at which two arrive: perhaps more than a double probability, because Truth is but one, and error manifold. When, then, twenty independent inquirers, all using faithfully the means which Christ has promised to bless, come to one conclusion, the probability that this is the right conclusion is immensely enhanced.

How is it, then, when many millions believe the same thing? How is it, when the great body of Christians are led to believe in one interpretation of Scripture as its true meaning? How is it, when they come to this conclusion in different countries, states of society, degrees of civilization, while holding adverse opinions on other subjects? How is it, when the dead are united with the living in bearing testimony to a certain interpretation of Scripture, as that to

which Christ by His Spirit has guided them? When to the present generation, we add the sixty generations of the past, the thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand from the Apostolic age to our own day, who, having labored in faith and hope, have now gone to their rest in peace and joy, and who, with considerable diversities of opinion as to many doctrines and usages, have yet agreed in *the Faith*, in the principles, the foundation of Divine Truth; what can we say, but that these have obtained what they sought, and that we are safe in following them?

And this, too, for another reason. This great "cloud of witnesses," who all attest the same essential Gospel, comprehend among them the purest and holiest representatives of Christianity; the Martyrs, the great Saints, the men of whom the world was not worthy. This is indisputable, and indeed, is undenied, that the men whom all Christians delight to honor, were men who believed in the ancient, generally received creed of Christendom; that they were not eccentric in their religion; that they were not innovators on the Faith.

What, then, is the spectacle we witness? That men believing a certain form of sound words, holding a distinct, definite, and historical

Faith, the Faith of all Christian ages and all Christian countries ; that these men have been the champions of the Cross, most holy in their tempers, and most heavenly in their lives. But Jesus Christ said it was the nature of His Truth to sanctify. These men were sanctified. What inference then is left, but that what they believed is the Truth ?

The great Physician tells us that His medicine is to produce a certain extraordinary result. The result is produced. What can we, if we revere Him, what can we believe, but that the medicine employed was that which He provided ; that the doctrine which purified, was the doctrine He taught ?

Surely it is incredible, it is impossible, that the Saints, Confessors, and Martyrs of Christianity were all mistaken in the very groundwork of that Faith, in the strength of which they lived, and in honor of which they died.

Now, this united testimony to the Truth, is what we mean by the voice of the Church. And, that we may see that its authority does not rest merely on the principles of reason, let us remember the declaration of St. Paul : that "the Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the Truth ;" sustains it, upholds it, proclaims it.

What then shall be thought of the humility and reasonableness of that man, who, on some cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, opposes his individual opinion, or that of some little ephemeral sect to which he belongs, to the testimony of the general Church of God? Why, the very act is his own sentence of condemnation. It proves nothing about the doctrine, but it proves much as to him; that he is that proud and haughty scorner, who is self-disqualified from understanding the Word and the ways of Christ. For it is "the meek He will guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach His way;" and except we become "as little children," we cannot enter His kingdom. This single consideration is enough to satisfy us of the utter fallacy of all new-fangled opinions in religion; whether we call them developments, as the Romanists do; or discoveries, as the founders of new sects proclaim their notions to be.

This line of thought applies mainly to *the Faith*; that is, to the elementary and essential principles of the Gospel. Concerning these we may say, they are settled by manifold testimonies of Scripture, understood in the same sense by the great body of the faithful of all times and countries; and he who endeavors to unsettle them, is an adversary to the

Truth as it is in Jesus, and an enemy of our souls.

But, besides these great and indispensable truths, there are very important doctrines of the Gospel, not, perhaps, essential to our salvation, but yet comforting and strengthening and purifying when made known to us. How shall we, as to these, ascertain what is Truth?

Undoubtedly, our first duty is to use diligently all the means of ascertaining the true sense of Scripture, which Providence has placed in our power. The God of Scripture, is the God of Providence. If, then, He gives us a book, which it is oftentimes hard to understand, and at the same time, provides us with means to understand it, He surely thereby intimates to us that we must use these means. A man who meets with some difficulty in Scripture, but yet makes no careful inquiry, searches for no collateral source of light, but leaps to some explanation which he is then prepared to maintain to be the true one; this man, in effect, has rejected the help which God offers him, and has no right to believe that God has guided him to his conclusion.

God guides those only who observe the way-marks He has set up: and if the careless inquirer even pray for wisdom to understand the Scrip-

tures, he has no right to expect a favorable answer to his prayers. Prayer unaccompanied by the use of means is a mockery of God, not a reverent worship offered Him. . The husbandman who prays for a harvest, while he does not cultivate his fields, exhibits, not piety, but presumption. And he who seeks to know the meaning of Scripture, and neglects to use all available means which may assist him to understand it, is likely to wander on in darkness: nay, his darkness will be the more profound because he supposes he has found the light.

So, then, when at a loss as to the meaning of God's Word, it is our plain duty to compare Scripture with Scripture, to use, as far as we can, the labors of the wise, and the learned, and the pious, who have investigated the same subject. We must inquire whether there has been in the Church a settled interpretation of a doubtful passage, or a clear definition of one that is obscure; and if we find such, although not absolutely bound by it, in matters not "*de fide*," not fundamental truths; yet we must always respect it and allow it great weight.

Having thus informed ourselves; having thus prepared the materials for judgment; we must humbly and earnestly cast ourselves upon God to help us, and pray Him to enlighten our judg-

ment and guide us to the Truth. Then may we well hope that prayers offered up in the spirit of docility will be graciously heard; and that to us will be fulfilled those words of encouragement: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Now, let me briefly sum up what I have been teaching.

1st. That all moral and religious truth important to mankind and essential to our welfare, is contained in Holy Scripture; so that, in the language of our Article, "Whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith; or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Tradition then, the writings of the Fathers, the decrees of councils and the like, however valuable for other purposes (and for some important purposes they are very valuable), are yet, not a part of Revelation, nor a source of Divine Truth.

2dly. In the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the voice of the Church, in all ages, is always authoritative and sometimes conclusive. It is conclusive in doctrines essential to salvation. The Church of Christ as a whole cannot have erred in the essentials of salvation, otherwise,

the great body of believers have perished because of their Faith; which is plainly inconsistent with the very purposes for which the Church was given, and with Christ's promise to be with it to the end of the world, and that the gates of Hell should not prevail against it. This principle is fatal to all new lights in religion, especially to such as bear on essential doctrines.

3dly. In understanding doctrines not essential to salvation, and yet important, it is necessary to use human means, together with earnest, hearty prayer for Divine guidance. And yet even here, a large measure of respect and deference is due to the uniform and distinct teachings of the Church. Now, the Church of Christ has summed up those doctrines which she judges essential to salvation in her Creeds. These we must receive at our soul's peril. There are others as to which her testimony throughout the ages and throughout the world is also distinct and plain, although they are not placed by her on the same ground of necessity with the truths of the Creed. These are the lawfulness and usefulness of Infant Baptism, and of Confirmation; the Apostolic Succession in the Ministry; the divine origin and obligation of the Eucharist and the like.





THE HOLY GHOST OUR ONLY HELPER.

UPON a certain day the Church at Hamner was unusually crowded. It had been found convenient to hold an ordination there, and two deacons, both of them young men, were to be admitted to the Holy Order of Priests.

If my readers have never witnessed such a service, I can scarce convey any idea of its solemnity to them; but I will rapidly sketch some of the features in it.

The deacons, habited in their surplices, sat outside the chancel-rail in chairs provided for them; and the morning service proceeded as usual. The sermon was preached by an aged minister, whose words fell with all the weight to which experience and long-tried goodness entitled them. His theme was the goodness of God, as manifested in keeping alive in the world an ambassador of peace; in sending abroad messengers to proclaim His mercy, and ministers authorized to assure all

penitent believers of His favor and goodness towards them.

At the close, he addressed himself to the two candidates, who rose to their feet to receive his charge. The tear glistened in the old man's eye, and his voice trembled with pathos, as he reminded them of the heavy burden which must henceforth rest upon them, and assured them that they need never sink under it, so long as they placed all their dependence upon the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

The sermon being finished, the candidates were presented to the bishop by Mr. Worthy. The bishop, sitting in his chair, bade him take heed that they were apt and meet; and he replied, that he had inquired concerning them, and also examined them, and found them so to be.

Then the bishop rose and addressed the people, demanding that if any person knew any grave objection against these persons just presented, he should come forth in the name of God and declare it. He paused a moment or two for a reply; and when no objecting voice was heard, commended the candidates to the prayers of the congregation, and proceeded with the Litany and Ante-communion.

The Gospel being ended, the deacons remained standing, and the bishop, from his chair, address-

ed to them the exhortation prescribed, reminding them anew of the excellency and difficulty of the priestly charge, and of the only means by which they could discharge it aright. And then followed searching questions as to their motives and purposes in undertaking this office, and the answers, in which they declared firmly, but modestly, their good intent.

Presently the bishop again addressed the congregation, inviting them to offer secretly their prayers in this behalf. All kneeled down reverently ; for a few moments a most solemn silence prevailed ; not a sound was heard save the deep breathing of those who, with unspoken words, entreated Almighty God to bless and strengthen these frail men, about to receive His commission. Then the silence was broken by the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. The candidates remained on their knees, while the bishop and clergy gathered around them, and repeated responsively that solemn invocation of the Holy Ghost :

“ Come, Holy Ghost, eternal God,
Proceeding from above,
Both from the Father and the Son,
The God of peace and love !

* * * * *

“ O Holy Ghost ! into our minds
Send down thy heavenly light ;

Kindle our hearts with fervent zeal
To serve God day and night.

“ Our weakness strengthen and confirm ;
(For, Lord ! thou know’st us frail,)
That neither devil, world, nor flesh
Against us may prevail.”

And presently the bishop and the priests laid their hands upon the heads of those who were to be ordained, and the divine commission was given :

“ Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven ; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained ; and be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of His holy sacraments : in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

When the young people of the parish met a few days afterwards in their accustomed Bible Class, which was conducted by Mr. Worthy in an easy and conversational manner, the usual lesson was soon despatched ; and the minister requested them to open their Prayer-books at the office for the Ordering of Priests.

“ I am sure,” said he, “ that you were all deeply interested in the service you have lately witnessed.

We can scarce spend a half hour more profitably than in talking about it. I should like to know what was the chief impression it made upon you."

No one replied for a moment, and then a little girl answered :

"I thought it was the most awful service I ever heard : it made me tremble all over." And being encouraged to explain herself, she mentioned several features in the service : the appeal to the people to speak out, if the men were unworthy, made her heart beat ; and the questions were so searching ; but she dwelt especially upon the exhortation to the candidates, and that portion of it which reads thus :

"Have always, therefore, printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which He bought with His death, and for whom He shed His blood. The Church and Congregation whom you must serve, is His Spouse, and His Body. And if it shall happen that the same Church, or any member thereof, do take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore, consider with yourselves the end of the Ministry towards the children of God, towards the Spouse and Body of Christ : and see that ye never cease

your labor, your care and diligence, until ye have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life."

"I thought," said she, "what a heavy responsibility a priest has ; being bound to answer for all the sheep, and to see that none of them go astray. I wondered how any one could undertake so much."

"I am glad, my young friends, that this thought has been brought to your notice. If it shall lead you to sympathize with your ministers, and to pray for them, it will be very useful."

"Sometimes you are tempted to think your spiritual pastors importunate and troublesome ; you do not like them to find fault with you or advise you ; but see how the case stands. We watch for your souls as they that must give account. In the day of judgment, besides answering for ourselves, we shall be questioned, Where is the flock that was given thee, the beautiful flock ? And woe is unto us, if, through any negligence of ours, the wolf has crept into the

fold and wasted the Lord's heritage. It is indeed a fearful load for any man to bear, but the Lord calls us to it, and we must do the best we can."

"Sir," said the sympathizing little girl, "can we young people do any thing to help you?"

"That you can. The chief of all is to let us save you; yourselves to strive and pray, while we watch and preach; you can come to me, if I neglect to go after you; you can set a good example, and keep a place for me in your prayers. In a thousand ways you can help me; but the chief of them is, to take care that I shall not have to answer for a lost soul."

"Mr. Worthy," said our friend Brenda, "my feeling was, that not for worlds would I undertake such a responsibility."

"There is another side to that question, Miss Brenda. The reward is as great as the responsibility; the apostles sit on twelve thrones, and the seventy elders stand in the close presence of God. And then we are not thrown upon our resources, for Christ is with us always, even to the end of the world.

"Now I beg of you to notice this beautiful and leading feature in the ordination service—the spirit of simple dependence upon God's Holy Spirit. Will you mention some of the illustra-

tions of it? For instance, what moves a man to undertake the priestly office?"

Brenda read from the service for the ordering of deacons:

"Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory, and the edifying of His people?"

"*Answer.* I trust so."

"Here you see the first motion and disposition of the heart is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Now whence comes the authority of the priest?"

Minnie read from the prayer: "Almighty God, giver of all good things, who by *thy Holy Spirit* hast appointed divers orders of ministers in thy Church;" and added that the Holy Ghost was solemnly invoked, and the bishop says, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest."

"And to all this," continued the minister, "add the spirit of dependence upon the Holy Ghost for the ability to exercise the office which he confers. The bishop says: 'Howbeit ye cannot have a mind and will thereto of yourselves: for that will and ability is given of God alone. Therefore ye ought, and have need, to pray earnestly for His Holy Spirit.'

"The candidates invariably add to their answers, 'By God's grace,' 'By the help of God.'

Nothing is plainer here, than that the priest of God must depend for success, not upon his talents, his learning, his zeal, but upon the help and comfort of the living God,—the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit. Relying on these, feeble and sinful men may dare to take the care of the souls of others, and to become watchmen, stewards, and messengers of the Lord.

“And now,” added Mr. Worthy, closing the Prayer-book from which he had been quoting, “I will tell you why I have invited your thoughts to this ordination service. I have desired to show you that according to the teachings of the Bible and the Prayer-book, a spirit of simple dependence upon the help of God’s Holy Spirit is the great necessity of all who undertake religious duty.

“Men must seek the priesthood, not for the sake of making a living or to gain a reputation, but because the Holy Spirit moves them to it: they must not make themselves priests, but they must receive their authority from the Holy Ghost who presides in the Church, and who conveys the office to men by the laying on of the bishop’s hands. And then, in discharging that ministry, they are taught that they will be blessed and prospered just in proportion as they distrust their own powers and lean only upon

the hope of God's heavenly grace. When I am weak, then am I strong, said St. Paul. All experience shows that the usefulness of ministers depends much more on this, than on their talents and popularity. If it is thus with the priests of God, it must be the same with the people of God. Your great need is this same temper of humble reliance on God's Holy Spirit.

"And indeed," he proceeded to say, "hands have been laid on most of you: when you were confirmed, you too were ordained and consecrated to a holy life, to high and noble employments. It was the Holy Ghost who persuaded you to undertake those vows; it was the Holy Ghost, acting through His appointed minister, who accepted them, and confirmed you in your privileges as members of the Church. And in all the trials and difficulties that await you in life, your happiness and safety entirely depend upon your reliance on Him. So long as you are afraid of yourselves, and feel that without help temptation will be too hard for you, you are safe. But whenever you think you are doing right well, and are pleased with yourselves for your faithfulness, depend upon it, you will soon stumble and fall.

"I remember once a young man who was much interested in the subject of religion: he

told me that he never intended to become a member of the Church until, for the space of three months, he could live just as he thought a Christian ought to live.

“And then, said I, we shall have to arrange a new service for you, so that you can get up before the congregation and thank God that you are not as other men, and can take care of yourself. No, he said, he did not mean that: but he intended to make sure that the love of sin was dead within him, and that he had the steadfastness to live up to his vows. I tried to show him how wrong that notion was: I talked to him about the prodigal, and the weeping Mary, and the presumptuous Peter; but it was all in vain: he said he wanted to feel certain of his steadfastness; and he gradually fell away in his attendance at the church, and went elsewhere. Soon after, I heard that he had been converted: his experience was considered very wonderful. When I saw him, he told me that he knew all was right now; he could tell the exact time and place when the change came over him. He knew, so he said, that he had religion, and could hold on to it. My only answer was to quote the text, ‘And the publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!’

"I saw that man a few years afterwards: he was then an avowed infidel, and declared that all religion was a deceit. Believe me, my dear young people, religion may be summed up in that one word, dependence. We must begin and end as little children. Woe unto us if we try to walk alone!"

One of the young people (she was a communicant of the Church) had listened, with evident trouble, to this conversation. She was very confiding, and when the others dispersed, tarried a moment to speak to the minister.

"Sir, I am in great trouble. I have behaved very badly to-day."

"Well, my child, if you have behaved badly, I am glad that it troubles you; it would be a sad thing if it did not make you unhappy. What was it all?"

"At school, to-day, one of the girls was doing something wrong—"

"Never mind about the particulars of what she did; it was something wrong."

"Yes, sir, and I told her that her mother's child ought to be ashamed to do so; and she answered that I was a hypocrite, and thought myself better than other people; and then I became very angry, and told her she was impertinent."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Worthy.

"And I did not deserve it," said the little girl, bursting into tears. "I do not think myself better than other people. This morning I had thought what a great sinner I was, and felt more humble than usual."

Mr. Worthy did not reply; but going to his bookcase, took down a volume of Hannah More's works, and having found a paragraph, bade the little girl read a sentence or two. Just then some one called him, and the little girl was left with the book in her hand. She read somewhat as follows:

"Vanity often arises in the very act of abjuring it, and after confessions, prayers, and tears, we rise from our knees, feeling proud that we have humbled ourselves so eloquently."

At first she was puzzled; then a gleam of intelligence came over her face. When the minister re-entered, she hastened to say—

"I see it now, sir; I was proud of thinking so humbly of myself,—vain of my self-knowledge. I was a Pharisee without knowing it, and so gave good advice in a bad, vain-glorious spirit."

"That, no doubt, is the truth of the matter, my daughter. In other words, you forgot your dependence."

"Ah, me! what shall I do?"

"When we have done wrong, the next thing is, if possible, to right it."

"How must I right it, sir?"

"I had rather not tell you. Suppose you try to find out; try to be dependent on the Holy Ghost, both for the wisdom to know what is right, and the self-denial to do it."

"Good-bye," said the little girl; and closing the gate, she chose, not the usual road home, but a quiet and lonely path through the meadow: midway she paused and remained some time seated on the root of a tree, with her head between her hands, and her sun-bonnet drawn over her eyes.

Presently she rose with a determined air, saying to herself, "With the Lord's help I'll try: but how she will scorn me!"

A group of young folks were assembled where the path left the meadow: seated on the stile was one whose brow darkened as our little friend approached, and her attitude indicated that she had no intention to make room for her to pass. But then came, in an humble voice, the words, "Mary, you said I thought too much of myself, and I have found out that is the truth. I was rude to you—please forgive me." And then she stood as if expecting a rough retort. But Mary was hasty, not ungenerous. In a moment she

sprung up, threw her arms around her neck, and said: "You are a dear little thing; and you shall say any thing you choose to me."

Mr. Worthy, taking his evening walk, passed the little girls, their hands clasped together.

"You seem to be good friends," he said.

"That we are, sir; and Mary will join the Bible Class next week."

And so they went their way.



Tracts for Missionary Use.

No. 17.

THE WOMAN OF A TROUBLED SPIRIT.

A NARRATIVE.



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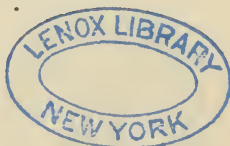
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THE WOMAN OF A TROUBLED SPIRIT.

IN anticipation of the Bishop's visit, Mr. Worthy had invited the ladies of the congregation to form a Confirmation Class. The invitation was extended to all who were disposed to consider the question of personal religion: assurance was given that no offensive importunity would be used, and that attendance would not be deemed a pledge or promise to be confirmed.

Among the attendants Mr. Worthy found a lady, who had occasionally been present at the Church services, and whose appearance was singularly interesting.

Mrs. Edwards was highly intellectual, and had enjoyed and improved superior advantages of education. She led a secluded life in the family of her brother. In manners she was reserved; and for some years she had been a widow and childless. She was a punctual and interested attendant at the conversations and readings on Confirmation. In these the minister endeavored

to unfold the plan of salvation, to meet common difficulties and objections, and to explain the meaning of those vows which the Church requires to be uttered by her children.

Mrs. Edwards had never been baptized. In due season Mr. Worthy sought her at home, and introduced the subject nearest her heart, by observing that it would afford him great pleasure to see her a member of the Church. He asked her whether there was any cause to hinder her from assuming, with a good conscience, the vows of holy baptism.

Mrs. Edwards said in reply, that there was nothing which she so much desired; but she did not think herself fit. She was selfish and ill-tempered, and had no constancy of purpose; she would be a disgrace to the Church.

"O Jane!" said a lady friend, who was present, "how can you talk so? Mr. Worthy, she is a better Christian now than any of us."

But this contradiction, so far from encouraging Mrs. Edwards, seemed to give her pain.

Mr. Worthy then turned to her, and answered, that he was not disposed to persuade her into a better opinion of herself; that he did not doubt she had infirmities and sins, which afforded just cause for humiliation and abasement. By judicious questions he elicited from her the confes-

sion, that these sins were her heaviest burden ; that she would hesitate at no sacrifice to be rescued from their dominion ; that she had fully made up her mind to do the will of God as best she could. She did not doubt the mercy of the Saviour, the perfectness of His atonement, the richness of His grace. But her chief difficulty was, doubt of her own sincerity. Said she, with no small agitation, "If I were really and truly desirous to lead a new life, surely I would see some little improvement, and not be breaking my good resolutions every day and every hour."

Here her friend reminded her that she had improved ; everybody around her noticed how conscientious and particular she had been. But as Mr. Worthy's face showed some annoyance at her well-meant suggestions, she added no more. And Mrs. Edwards, resuming, mentioned her other chief difficulty, viz.: that if truly converted, she ought to have some sensible assurance and evidence of the fact.

Her friend having retired, she became more communicative. She had tried so hard to be converted ; she had sought out the most awakening preachers ; she had, at great violence to her feelings, taken her place again and again among the "mourners ;" she had shut herself up day and night, and fasted, and wept, and read all

the most dreadful books; but her heart was hard, and, she added, with quiet despair, there seemed to be no mercy for her; she supposed it must be all right.

Ah, reader! this is no lone case. Under the influence of false teaching, many a gentle soul lies now in this very slough of despair. Have you studied your Bible and Prayer-book well enough to know how to relieve such prisoners?

Mr. Worthy listened kindly and patiently. "And so," said he, "you are not content to let the Saviour suffer for you. You would make your own peace, and pacify God by punishing your own self."

"Oh, sir, I do not mean that."

"How hard is it for men to escape this error. Whether we tear the flesh with a scourge and put sharp flints in our shoes, or whether we lash the spirit and vex it into agony, it is all the same. It is all a worthless supplement to that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction which Christ has already made for us. Why cannot we believe the love that God hath to us?"

"Madam," continued he, "God has not now to be reconciled to you and to me. It only needs that we be reconciled to Him. All that He demands is, that we accept His mercy and the con-

ditions which are annexed to it. His compassion is moved by the blood of His dear Son, not by our agony and distress of mind. What He asks, is genuine contrition, simple faith, honest purpose. Peter wept, the publican sighed, Zaccheus did neither; but all were true penitents. Believe me, God is more ready to hear than we to pray. He does not ask of us slavish dread, but filial sorrow."

Such is an outline of the first conversation. They parted, with the remark on Mrs. Edwards' part, that she was sincerely obliged to him for not trying to persuade her that she was better than she really was. Mr. Worthy knew well, that in spite of her bitter self-accusations she was, in truth, singularly unselfish, and gentle, and industrious. But he had long since found out that it comforts the humble-minded to acquiesce in all the bitter things they say of themselves, and to dwell upon the mercy of God to the chief of sinners.

Not long after, Mr. Worthy called again, and urged upon Mrs. Edwards the duty of being baptized without delay. He discovered, as he had expected, that she was desirous to take this step, but doubted whether her "experience" was of such a character as to justify the step.

"What experience," said he, "have you in

your mind as the type to which you would have yours to conform?"

She hesitated a moment, and then suggested the conversion of St. Paul.

"Very well. The Church has a festival bearing this title, and bids us to have his wonderful conversion in remembrance. I presume the likeness you desire is in the great features of his repentance, not in the things accidental and personal." And while the lady assented to this reasonable proposition, he drew the Bible towards him, and opened it at the ninth chapter of the Acts.

"First, then, compare yourself in past years with Saul of Tarsus, the zealous Pharisee. How stands the case?"

"We are alike, sir, in being blinded, self-righteous sinners, fighting against God, and failing to worship Him in spirit and in truth."

"This, then, gives us a starting-point. And you had need that Christ should seek you out as He sought Saul; obstruct your way; convince you of your sin, and make you cry, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? But tell me: Saul was a persecutor and injurious; he set himself in an attitude of distinct hostility to Christ, His people, and His doctrine. Has it been thus with you?"

“Oh no, sir, never. From my youth up I always revered the Saviour, and desired to be a Christian, and to see His doctrine spread. But for all that, I have been a great sinner.”

“The first step in Saul’s conversion was the conviction of sin and of danger. Compare your late convictions with his. You cannot ask for a strict resemblance in the circumstances. He was in the midst of an impious career, and on a mission of persecution: you for years past have been suffering the terrors of the Lord with a troubled mind. He was arrested by a miracle, and our Lord appeared to him in an awful and mysterious manner: you have been reached by ordinary agencies, and to you the Holy Spirit has come like the whisper-wind, quietly, and without outward show. Is it reasonable to expect in your case the same physical prostration and mental horror which Saul experienced as he fell by the wayside?”

“No, sir, I do not expect that; but I ought to have the same feelings and dispositions when I see that I have been fighting and rebelling against God, that Saul had when Christ spoke to Him.”

“Let us notice, then, what these feelings were. Saul’s first question is, Who art thou, Lord? His ear is now open; he desires now to hear his

Lord's voice, and to know who and what He is. Is not this exactly paralleled in your own quickened attention, your earnest desire to know the Saviour and understand His purposes to you.

"And what next? 'And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Madam, have you not been in this state for weeks and months past? Has it not been your cry by night and by day, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

"Oh, sir, I would give worlds if I only knew what He desires of me. In the agony of my heart I have uttered that cry hundreds of times."

There was a pause, and a tear stood in the eye of the teacher and of his pupil. Presently Mr. Worthy resumed:

"Let us proceed with the story. Our Lord, instead of Himself instructing Saul, bids him arise and go into the neighboring city and receive the teachings which should there be provided for him. And Saul arose from the earth, and although blinded and feeble, and needing to be led by the hand, did exactly as he was commanded.

"And you, my friend, have done just so. The Word of God itself directed you to a place where you might obtain the knowledge you desire. It is in this spirit that you attended

the Church, and the Confirmation Class, and that you now afford me the privilege of conversing with you."

"Oh, I see it," said the lady, with a smile of unaffected pleasure. "The Church is Damascus, and I am wicked Saul, and you the good Ananias."

"At least, madam, in the present instance, I shall try to be like him."

"But, Mr. Worthy, Saul was *at once* converted."

"Perhaps so; but not in the sense you mean it. It may be that at once he found pardon; but it is certain he did not find peace. When his eyes were opened he saw no man; he remained three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. What do you suppose employed him in those days of fasting and darkness? 'Behold he prayeth,' is the account given of him. In those days of seclusion and darkness he bewailed the past, and resolved upon his course in the future. Who can tell with what bitter lamentations and pleading cries his chamber resounded! The address of Ananias, Why tarriest thou—arise, implies that he was in a state of despondency."

"Mr. Worthy, I thank you. Strange that I should not have noticed these things myself. I seem to have thought of Saul as rising from the

ground, as the vision faded away, and going on his way in an ecstasy of joy. But he was kept a while in the low dungeon, like the rest of us."

"But the story is not ended. Let me be your Ananias, my sister," said Mr. Worthy, with a solemnity which deeply moved his auditor. "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight. He has taught you to say, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? He has given you time, in secret and in sorrow, to bewail your errors and to resolve upon a holy life. And now why tarriest thou? What else do you expect? Will you spend life in mere lamentation, or will you go forth to redeem the past? You need comfort now: your bleeding heart needs now to be bound up and mollified with ointment. Christ has empowered even me to declare and pronounce to His penitent people the absolution and remission of their sins. You do truly repent of your sins, and purpose henceforth to do the will of God. You do cling to the cross of Christ, and lean only upon the hope of His heavenly grace. Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord!"

"Oh, sir, I am the chief of sinners; but if my Lord will receive me, such as I am, I am ready to do His will."

Mrs. Edwards was baptized on the following Sunday, but not without renewed encouragements on the part of her pastor. She still feared she was not worthy. Her agitation was increased by a letter from a friend, himself attached to no religious denomination, but said to be a very pious man, in which he warned her of the great danger of joining the Church without any religion, and intimated that Episcopal ministers were apt to cry, Peace, peace, when there was no peace.

Alas! what a bad opinion of us some good people have!

On the day before her baptism, Mrs. Edwards' heart almost failed her. But at the close of that day, as Mr. Worthy, wearied with its excitements, reclined in his solitary study, he said within himself, Would to God that I had a tithe of the humility, and purity, and earnestness of that poor timid soul, trembling as she touches the hem of the Saviour's garment. I wish I had a church full of these people who have no religion—to *speck* of.

Mrs. Edwards was confirmed and admitted to the communion not long after her baptism; she applied herself diligently to all her Christian duties, and studiously avoided all things contrary to her profession. She was very punctual in at-

tendance with other ladies upon a class formed for the purpose of instructing the lately-confirmed in the grounds and reasons of the Christian faith, and Mr. Worthy was led to wonder more and more at the clearness of her intellect.

After the lapse of a year, however, she became much dispirited. Upon Communion Sundays she was often absent; and she seemed to avoid her religious privileges.

Upon conversing with her, Mr. Worthy found her greatly troubled in conscience; she was afraid that she had been entirely mistaken in the beginning; she did not keep her good resolutions; she was not worthy to communicate. And yet there was a grief and sadness in view of her supposed obduracy, a conscientiousness in all her words and ways, which were inconsistent with the supposition of wilful sin.

Mr. Worthy did all that he could. The time would fail to relate their protracted conversations. By a strange perverseness she refused to take hold of the comforts of the Gospel, while he would see her listening with agony to rebukes which she, least of any in the congregation, deserved. All his efforts to relieve her distress were utterly unavailing; while yet her affection for him never diminished, and she continually showed him thoughtful kindness.

A year or two passed thus. She intimated to him that she doubted whether it was right for her to attend week-day services, and to join in the prayers ; was it not hypocrisy in one destitute of all grace ? With some difficulty he persuaded her to abandon such fancies. Said he, about this time,

“I wish I knew your precise difficulty !”

“Can you not understand it ? It is simply that I have not and never had any religion. I have been self-deceived, if not a hypocrite.”

Mr. Worthy replied only by quoting as to himself : “Her spirit is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.”

It must be confessed also, that sometimes she said sinful words, such outcries and complaints as one may find in the Book of Job. But Mr. Worthy could not bring himself to regard the words of one that was desperate.

Mr. Worthy did not fail to ask counsel of his Bishop, but he could only advise assiduous and sympathizing care.

The pastor now applied himself more seriously than ever to the study of the case.

Physically, Mrs. Edwards was very delicate. For many years her health had been wretched. She was plainly oppressed with organic disease ;

while yet with pale cheeks, and livid lips, and fluttering heart she went about her avocations, and was always pained at any allusion to her health. Her temperament was melancholic; had always been so, and Mr. Worthy dwelt upon the fact that other members of the family were similarly affected. And yet her sense of the ludicrous was difficult to control. He had noticed how, in her utmost wretchedness, any thing absurd disturbed her equanimity, and then how bitterly she reproached herself afterwards.

She had few words and no professions; she was singularly undemonstrative; and yet children clung to her by instinct, and those who knew her loved her most devotedly. Her speech was severe in its veracity, and void of all censoriousness. Her timidity was equalled by her firmness, when occasion demanded; and in all the details of life she was prudent, industrious, unselfish, and conscientious.

"She cannot be aught else than a sincere child of God," said Mr. Worthy, as he paced his study. "If there were to-day a call for martyrs, I would choose her out of all the flock. I will not give her up."

This resolution was soon tested. Mrs. Edwards sent for him. She said that she had long abstained from the Communion, and that in such

cases discipline should be administered. And besides, she was now utterly hardened and reprobate ; her only concern was, that she gave him pain and anxiety ; to the rest she was indifferent. And she concluded with the request, very deliberately determined upon, that he would strike her name from the roll, and think no more about her.

“ I will not do it,” said the minister. “ I know my duty, and intend to discharge it. I have yet to find the passage in my instructions which bids me cast the sick sheep to the wolves outside.”

Thus the matter stood for a while ; Mrs. Edwards was so agitated by discussion, and Mr. Worthy had so exhausted arguments, that he deemed it best to wait, in prayerful hope that God would drive away these shadows.

In this he was not disappointed. The providence of God brought about such a change in Mrs. Edwards' home, as to give her more active employment, and to afford her a much larger measure of companionship and Christian sympathy than she had before enjoyed ; her health improved, and her mind regained something of its elasticity.

A Lenten season came ; and its services seemed to soothe and quiet her. Mr. Worthy, satisfied that the Holy Spirit was with her, feared to

obtrude too much, only he dropped many a word of comfort. One sermon affected her deeply,—the lesson to Peter: “He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet.” He earnestly argued that the Gospel has a remedy for our daily errors as well as for our life-long sin; and then when we go astray, we have not need to go all the way back and commence our race anew, but rather to turn in again, and be forgiven. All this, he said, is symbolized in Baptism once administered, and the Holy Communion often administered.

The Bishop’s visit was at hand. On the Sunday previous the rector spoke of the benevolence of God in appointing divers orders of ministers in the Church. He reminded the people that they had two pastors; that it was the privilege of the Bishop, as chief pastor, to administer the Communion to them. He spoke of the help thus afforded to realize the communion of saints, and earnestly requested every communicant to be present.

Nor was he disappointed; never had the holy table been so thronged with guests.

Mr. Worthy deemed this a fit occasion to adventure once more to the relief of his disconsolate friend. On the morning of that communion day he addressed her a note. He said—

"I have reason to hope that to-day all our little flock will receive the emblems of salvation from our chief pastor. I write just to say that I shall think of you, and sadly miss you.

"You may say what you will of yourself, I feel assured that your heart is with us; that the love of Christ is dearer to you than all other things beside. Oh, how willing is the Saviour,—He who calls the weary and heavy laden,—how willing is He to receive you as a guest!"

And the darkness began to roll away, and all day long she wept tears of trustful penitence.

Her reply was as follows:

"SUNDAY MORNING, *August 7th.*

"MY DEAR SIR:

"What shall I say in return for all your kindness to me? It is, indeed, unceasing. I have wept over your note until I can scarcely see. For *you* to write in such a strain to *me*! I must be a hypocrite; indeed, to deceive you so completely. And to think that I should add any thing to your griefs, which were before enough!

"I believe I will go back to the beginning, and give you a history of my troubles. I have never intended to hide them or to make a mystery of them; and many times have longed to

open all my grief to you; but it has seemed impossible to do so.

“When I first came into the Church I believe I was sincere. I think I can claim that one single qualification. I really felt the vows I uttered in baptism, and tried to go, trusting nothing to my own strength. I knew full well my own sinfulness, and I felt heaven to be so desirable, that no sacrifice or effort would be too great to make in order to attain it.

“Well, the warfare commenced. I endeavored to try. Poor, feeble efforts they were, but they seemed my best.

“After two or three years passed away, and I found that I had not gained one victory, or conquered one evil inclination, my heart sank within me. Sometimes I stayed away from the holy communion because afraid to go: again I became afraid to neglect a means of grace.

“I could do nothing right. I saw that my religion was all profession. I was terrified, and very unhappy. I desired counsel, but could not bring myself to converse freely with you. Afraid to doubt God, I concluded that I had been in the wrong path all the time.

“On one Communion Sunday I went to church, determined to try once more, and prayed with all the feeble strength I had. Your text was,

‘If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.’ This seemed a plain proposition, and my heart, alas! condemned me. But still, I resolved to try for the next month to be very careful and watchful, and if I saw no improvement by the next Communion, to go no more. I went home and drew off a list of my besetting sins, and kept a faithful record of my conduct. At the end of the month the paper was completely covered with marks and blots. I threw it into the fire, and gave up completely, feeling deserted by man and God.

“For two years my Bible was much neglected. I would not have attended church, except for fear of the influence on others of such an example. When there, I tried not to hear a word of the sermon, nor to join in the prayers, except when poor sick —— was prayed for; while the scorn and contempt I felt for myself were past expression.

“The only redeeming trait was the love I always bore you and every member of your family. And I dearly loved the little church, while I hated to go there.

“But, for a year past, a little better spirit has reigned in my heart. One of your sermons affected even me. I have been trying to do better.

“I now promise you, I will try to live as a Chris-

tian; but I fear it is all out of regard for you. I am so besotted that I cannot love God. Pray for me, I beseech you, for if ever I am saved, it will be owing to the efforts you have made for me.

“If this letter does no other good, it will humble my pride, and give you some insight into my character, some idea of my great sinfulness.

“Your grateful and attached friend,

“A. R. EDWARDS.”

Mr. Worthy had need to take a journey about this time, and a few weeks afterwards she wrote to him thus :

“Last Sunday the Holy Communion was administered as usual, and I attended. I hope you will not disapprove of this. I thought at first I would await your return; but as you had so recently invited me to come, I would not delay. I went, as you advised, with no plea but the publican's, and feeling that I did not deserve so great a privilege, after wilfully absenting myself so long. I was glad to go, and end the warfare with my own convictions.”

Our story is almost told. A year passed away, during which this lonely woman seemed to walk before God with a quiet and tranquil

spirit. The circle of her acquaintance and of her usefulness enlarged, and the hand of the Lord sustained her.

And then, one morning, they found her cold and dead. Her eyes were closed, her hands folded easily together, her face placid and serene. She had passed through the fiery furnace of trial, and was spared the death-pains which were not needed by her chastened spirit.

At this event, there came up a cry of lamentation from the whole community; even from the little children and servants. All doubts which Mr. Worthy might have felt were now scattered; for the general verdict of the people of all denominations was, that scarce any like her remained. Men spoke with reverence of her example; so pure, so gentle, so unselfish. And as the minister saw the earth laid upon her coffin, and realized that for her his office was discharged, he said, within himself, "What if I had given her up, and suffered her to break the tie of Christian fellowship! Thank God that I was patient; that I did not break the bruised reed!"

The writer is far from undervaluing peace and comfort. Joy is among the fruits of the Spirit, and it is a Christian duty to be happy and hopeful. He is far from presenting this case

as an example to be copied, or as the type of a healthy religious character.

But joy is not the test and proof of our reconciliation to God. It may be absent, while yet the gentler graces of humility, submission, holy strivings, prove that there is a life of God in the soul.

There are many obtuse, sluggish, carnal natures, which need intimidations and rebukes. But there is also a generation of feeble folk: of timid nature, of morbid temperament, of extravagant sensibility. And if, under the specious plea of *being faithful*, the minister deals roughly with such a one, administers rebukes which, however well deserved, are overmuch for the sickened heart to bear, he will but defeat his purpose.

In the day of Elijah's coward fears and sad despondency, his Lord did give him bread and water; and comforted him,—“the journey is too great for thee.” Then, after that, came the reproachful words, “What doest thou here, Elijah?”

12

Tracts for Missionary Use.
No. 18.

THE CONTENTED SHUNAMMITE.



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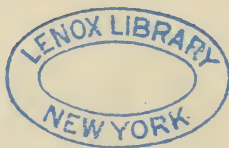
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In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.



THE CONTENTED SHUNAMMITE.

“Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care ; what is to be done for thee ? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host ? and she answered, I dwell among my own people.”—
2 KINGS, iv. 13.

AMONG the things incidental which give attractiveness to our blessed religion, a worthy place may be assigned to the endearing relations which spring up between those who minister, and those who are ministered unto, in holy things.

For as the one party have it in their power to give disinterested counsel to the doubting, and genial sympathy to the sorrowing, so the other, by thoughtful kindnesses and considerate hospitality, do testify their reverence for the sacred office, and strengthen the hearts of those entrusted with its administration.

It was by some such interchange of kindness that a warm friendship came to subsist between the prophet Elisha and a certain woman of Shu-

nem, whose name is not recorded. At the first, "she constrained him to eat bread" in her house, and presently he became an habitual guest; for she said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

Anxious to requite her kindness in some way, the prophet offered to use in her behalf the influence which he had at court. "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" "And she answered, I dwell among my own people."

Now this was a sensible, a religious, and (in the best sense of the word) a most womanly reply. It meant, that things were well enough with her as they were; she was in a position to which Providence had assigned her, and to which use had reconciled her; she had no reason to think that promotion in the army or civil list would make her family any better or any happier.

Oh, rare contentment! we may well exclaim,

which could thus take of choice the humbler path; which could thus look on office, and not be dazzled with the prospect. How few would have the strength of mind to resist such overtures as these !

There are many who have little enjoyment in what God has given them, because in thought and imagination they are ever reaching after some more favorable position, some happier combination of circumstances, wherein, as they suppose, they could enjoy themselves. It were hard to tell how many sad hours men do pass, in dreamy imaginations of how things might be; while of precious, present mercies, they say, as did Israel of old, "Nothing but this manna before our eyes."

Of course no one is to be blamed for seeking to better his condition: this very Shunammite had need at a later period of her life, "to cry unto the king for her house and her land;" and the prophet's name secured a favorable audience for her petition; but the common fault consists in calling that bad which is at least well enough, and in striving to better our condition (as we call it) contrary to the distinct intimations of the providence of God.

If any, then, is prone to disturb himself with the thought of how happy he might be, were it

in his power to order certain matters according to his own mind, we invite him to search out the question, and to consider whether it is not better "to dwell among his own people;" to be quiet and contented in the place to which he of right belongs.

What, then, do we say in our moments of restlessness and discontent? The sum of our complaint may be expressed in two words—RESTRAINT and ANNOYANCE: all of us, in our several spheres, must needs do without that which we like, and endure that which we much dislike. Let us calmly and fairly listen to these complaints.

I. Our lot in life has many privations and restraints.

Of this truth we are painfully conscious. There is not a day that we do not feel some restraint upon our freedom: we are free to move, but only within fixed limits; for circumstances chain us, as it were, by the foot. We cannot do what we wish to do, nor go where we would like to be; we must work when we would prefer to play, and in the employment of our time, consult less our own inclination, than the necessities of our position.

The child, for instance, is under tutors and governors, who sometimes will not, and sometimes cannot, render him a reason; delicate

health forbids some to wander abroad, or forbids them to use many articles of food; the mother is a slave to her little children and her domestic duties; the man of business is tied to his desk as hard and fast as though an iron chain did bind him: and yet, again, few are so rich in this world's goods, that they have not need to consult their poverty, and on the ground of expense to deny themselves many a gratification.

Which of us is always patient under these many checks of stern necessity? The tears will start even to Christian eyes when we are much bent on something, and this angel of the Lord, this ordering of Providence, is seen just in the way; and a voice not to be disregarded, bids us restrain our steps and get us back again. Musing on this, our slavery to circumstances, we are prone to deem our lot intolerable. Would that we could find some promotion! Would that some one would speak a word for us to the king or to the captain of the host, and so withdraw us from this inglorious treadmill of daily troubles and petty cares.

It becomes us, before we begin to fret at these restraints upon our independence, to inquire whether this freedom, for which we sigh, has any place on earth; whether in any conceivable

state of life we should be our own masters more than now we are: what say the witnesses?

Added years make not men free; for men of age look back regretfully to the dear bondage of childhood. If the sick be not free to move, neither is the well man free to sit still: put one necessity over against the other. If the mother be a servant, her fetters are gentle arms, and sweet are the accents which control her movements, and lofty the hopes she cherishes in her breast. Who would compare her bondage with that of the woman of fashion, with whom pleasure becomes a fatigue, and whose time, under the tyranny of custom, must be largely given to those who are indifferent, if not disagreeable to her? So also are rich men overmastered by their wealth; exposed to interruptions, vexations, and corroding cares; hard enough to bear, if we may judge by their loud complaints. And, in fine, if we look to that political promotion, which is most pertinent to the text, it is above all a slavery from which wise men should desire to escape, except greatness be thrust upon them; slavery to many masters; to an irresponsible public opinion, which too often would use the hands and tongues of its servants, and allow them no freedom of conscience and of judgment.

So, then, it is very possible that our com-

plaints, followed to their just conclusion, amount to this: we do not like God's world and God's ways; this world is not good enough, even to tarry in a while on our way to heaven.

In your moments of discontent, it were well to ask yourself, what is it that I crave? It is agreed on all hands that our present state is imperfect; the whole creation is groaning and travailing in bondage; and God's purest saints, they who have the earnest of the spirit, groan within themselves, and look for the adoption, even the redemption of the body: am I so weak and unreasonable as to rebel against this common lot, and to ask exemption from the indignities of restraint and servitude?

But even this does not exhaust the matter: for, were it possible to obtain such exemption, and to have our own way in every thing, how would it avail us?

Alas! my friends, with all the checks, and warnings, and sorrows of life; in spite of all the buffetings and oft-repeated chastisements we bear, who among us is truly humble and able to bear prosperity? to "carry a full cup even?" as good Archbishop Leighton has it. With what little measure of health, and independence, and favor we have (if any choose to call it little), we are heady, high-minded, and prone to creep upon

the ground. Who that is wise, would hastily banish any inconvenience which reminds him of his frailty, which prompts the look to heaven, and pours out the cry, "Undertake for me, O my God!"

We turn now to the other ground of complaint. It is said, and truly said, that—

II. *Our state in life exposes us to many annoyances.*

To the stranger, ours may seem to be an enviable condition; and indeed (say we) it would do well enough, were it not for a number of petty vexations, which do not necessarily belong to it, and from which Providence might readily exempt us. They are not matters of life and death; but thorns in the side, motes in the eye, pebbles in the shoe; their very littleness makes them harder to endure.

These annoyances, moreover, generally proceed, not from things, but from persons. Our "own people" vex us; our neighbors and friends stand in the way of a quiet and happy life.

And truly in this world we have to deal with "wicked and unreasonable men." St. Paul prayed to be delivered from such; perhaps the unreasonable taxed his patience as much as the wicked. We have to deal with men who cannot be persuaded to take just views of things; men

greatly influenced by caprice or interest ; with jealous people, suspicious people, who take offence when none is intended. In our more intimate circle of friends, we often observe a lack of delicacy, sympathy, and consideration for our feelings ; and, to come nearer home, in every large family connection, there are some whose peculiarities, whims, fancies, inconsideration, do constantly annoy us.

If we are weak enough to sit down and count up all these things, we are easily persuaded into a bad temper ; smarting under petty injuries, we long to escape from those who, however jealous of their own dignity and rights, show little respect for ours ; who must always be humored, and conciliated, and cared for. The plain answer to all this is, that as we cannot free ourselves from restraint, so neither can we get rid of annoyances and vexations. No painting, no statue, equals the conception in the mind of the artist ; his material is too rigid, his tools too imperfect. So can we never embody our ideal of happiness. Our Maker will not suffer it to be so now. We are not to be fully blessed until we see His face : “ when I wake up after Thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it.” Utter not, O mortal ! that prayer of the prodigal, “ Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me ;”

give it me in full, here in my hand, and now ; lest, when all is spent, thou mayest hear that voice of Abraham, "Son, remember, thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things."

Bear with the wicked and unreasonable for a while, for God beareth long with us ; and presently the elect of God, the good and wise, shall be set apart to themselves ; and in that goodly company the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

The phrase in which the Shunammite expressed her contentedness deserves here to be dwelt upon. Were her kindred always kind ? her neighbors always considerate ? her servants always diligent and respectful ? Did all scrupulously respect her rights ? did no hard looks or cold words come to cast a shadow over her face ? If the people of Shunem were like all other people, we cannot doubt that she had her share of the common troubles. But for all this she said, "I dwell among my own people."

My friends, do not, even in your thought, disparage your own people. Judge not hardly your neighbors and your kindred. They care for you, as strangers could not care ; they know you well, and perhaps adapt their manners and their talk to your peculiarities, more than you are conscious of. When they pass away, you

shall miss them sore, and mourn their absence, and find it a grief to see strangers in their places.

The evils of our state we feel; the good we are apt to overlook; that blameless lot which we imagine, is but a phantom, which, at our approach, vanishes into thin air. Ah! how much time we do spend in idle complaint! how curiously we enumerate our troubles! how careless are we to count up our mercies! Our minds dwell longer on one hard speech, than on words and deeds of kindness, which, if written, would fill a volume. Thankless are we for the health and plenty of many days; cast down at the pain and want of one brief hour.

The Gospel hath a threefold reconciliation to accomplish; it reconciles us first to God, and we have peace with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ; it reconciles us next to men, and we know that we passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; and it reconciles us yet again to our earthly toil and portion, and we learn in every thing to give thanks.

Brethren, we must be reconciled to our work, or we cannot be happy. The providence of God will not alter to suit our notions. Bonds and stripes await us; we are sure to receive evil (in appearance) at the hands of God, and wrong

from our brethren. Our peace of mind depends upon the temper in which we take what God sends. It rests with us whether we shall learn, like Paul, to sing at midnight, in the low dungeon, or, like Haman, to be full of bitterness when fortune seems most propitious.

We have thus considered things as they are ; let us now consider how they might be. Let us, with a sober imagination, devise an ideal life suited to a Christian man who has a good hope, through grace ; who looks for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

III. *What necessary things may a reasonable creature ask and expect as his earthly portion ?*

The items in this catalogue must be briefly mentioned : let us be liberal with ourselves and set down something too much rather than too little.

1. We need food and raiment, and reasonable comfort.

For these bodies of ours have their necessities ; and abject poverty has peculiar temptations. True, we should labor for something more : every creature of God is good, and religion pours no contempt on the things of beauty and refinement. Their presence is cause for gratitude ; their absence no ground for murmuring ; for we can be happy without them.

2. We need also work to do.

Good, hard work, which shall task us well, and prepare us by fatigue to enjoy repose. If we have it not, we should find it, or invent it, for without it life is a weariness; body and mind become diseased. We forfeit our self-respect when we are drones rather than workers. God give us all a manly task, which shall straiten us until we accomplish it; which shall stir every pulse, and string every sinew of our nature.

3. We must have some friends also.

Our burden is too great to bear alone; we were made for love, companionship, and sympathy. We must have some to love and counsel us; and better still, if we can gather around our hearth those whom instinct and the ties of nature make peculiarly our own; and who may draw out those holiest of human affections, conjugal and parental love.

4. We need some enemies as well.

Some to hate us, and speak ill of us, and spitefully entreat us. For we hold our heads too high when all men speak well of us, and so are apt to stumble. Without provocations, insults, injuries, how could we learn meekness, and patience, and charitable judgment? Without enemies, we could never exercise that quality of mercy to the injurious which we so reverence in our God.

5. We may also ask for some measure of success and prosperity.

Our faith may withstand much ; but unbroken darkness, relieved by no glimpse of pity and favor, were too much for it to bear. We ask not for our reward in time, yet our courage will fail if God show not some token for good ; if He do not sometimes smile upon the work of our hands.

Yet again—6. We need as imperatively, trials, losses, disappointments, and bereavements.

For how else are we to learn patience, exercise fortitude and resignation to the will of God ? If we had no losses we should grow so fast to this world, that when removed from it, the life of the soul would be endangered by the violence of the shock. If the jewels did not fall from our earthly crown, and angels catch them up to heaven, how obstinately would we cast our eyes downward ! If the good shepherd did not draw us by the pledge of the lamb carried on his bosom, how far would the poor sheep straggle ! It is in the storm that the depths of ocean give up their treasures ; in deepest grief man discovers the divinity of his nature. “Many a heart, like the alabaster box of ointment very precious, hath given out no fragrance, because it had need to be broken by a great sorrow.”

7. We need religious privileges.

God hath given us a Saviour and a Sanctifier, yet, forgetful creatures that we are, we need an open Bible wherein we may trace the paths of life; a living teacher who may explain and enforce the teachings of the Word; a Church where we may seek the face of God; holy sacraments in which we may certify our union with our Head; brethren with whom we may take sweet counsel together, and walk to the house of God in company.

And last of all—8. We need a little room scooped out in the bosom of our mother earth to hold our bones until the resurrection morn, a few handfuls of earth to be reverently sprinkled over our bodies, a prayer, a tear, and an undisturbed repose. Such seems to be a fair summary of our reasonable wants. With somewhat less than this, men have lived contentedly, and died happily.

Now have we not all these in possession? Food and clothes, and comforts not a few? some friends to love, and some enemies to forgive? Have we not many blessings to encourage, and enough of trials to keep us humble? have we not all needful directions, assistances, and comforts in our religious life? room for self-denial and deeds of mercy? Will any refuse us room when we come to be gathered to our fathers?

More ease! weightier trusts! increased temptations! what prudent men should invite them except it be God's will?

The Catechism teaches us that we should "learn and labor truly to get our own living, and to do our duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call us:" in *that* state, and not in some other.

Let us not, then, disparage our own state and our own people, nor reach after what we may not have, nor dream how good and happy we would be in certain imaginary circumstances. In the hour of incipient murmurs, let us think of the undeserved mercies we enjoy, and be thankful that we dwell among our own people. If work be a weariness, and duty irksome, and restraint displeasing, let us reconcile us to them, as the ordering of a wise and gracious Father who sees that we need discipline. And when we thus walk quietly along the way, nor fret under the yoke, the burden will adjust itself to our strength, and unseen hands uphold us where the road is rough and slippery. If, like this patient woman, we avoid, for the sake of duty, preferment which might be ours, it may be we shall hear that sweetest voice, "Friend, come up higher." The mother who, unpraised by men, had long patience with her froward child, may rank with the chief

of saints; and God himself give higher praise to one who ruled his spirit, than to one who 'captured cities.

* * * * *

Legh Richmond, in his "Young Cottager," describes himself as standing on one occasion near the open sea, in all its magnificence, bounded indeed, in one part, by a very distant shore, on the ascent of which the rays of the sun rendered visible a Cathedral Church; while at his feet a "little rivulet, gently rippling over pebbles, soon mingled with the sand, and was lost in the waters of the mighty ocean."

It is thus we stand upon the shores of eternity, and view from afar the spires of the heavenly city, while holy and humble men of heart are passing away into that unfathomed sea.

How beautiful the meditations of that Christian sage!

"I wish I were like this little stream of water. It takes its first rise scarcely a mile off, yet it has done good even in that short course. It has passed by several cottages in its way, and afforded life and health to the inhabitants; it has watered their little gardens as it flows, and enriched the meadows near its banks. It has satisfied the thirst of the flocks that are feeding aloft on the hills, and perhaps refreshed the shepherd's

boy who sits watching his master's sheep hard by.' It then quietly finishes its current in the secluded dell, and quickly vanishes in the ocean.

"May my course be like unto thine, thou little rivulet! Though short be my span of life, yet may I be useful to my fellow-sinners, as I travel onwards. Let me be a dispenser of spiritual support and health to many. Like this stream, may I prove the poor man's friend. * * * And, if it please Thee, O my God, let me in my latter end be like this brook. It calmly, though not quite silently, flows through this scene of peace and loveliness, just before it enters the sea. Let me thus gently close my days likewise; and may I not unusefully tell to others of the goodness and mercy of our Saviour, till I arrive at the vast ocean of Eternity!"

11.11.10

